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SUNSHINE AND SNOW.

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SUNSHINE AND SNOW

A Novel.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF "BREEZIE LANGTON," "TWO KISSES," "BROKEN BONDS," "BOUND TO WIN," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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SUNSHINE AND SNOW.

CHAPTER I.

"THE REGIMENTAL CUP."

On the top of a small knoll, which might almost be designated a hill in a county that could boast of little more than undulating ground, are assembled a mixed assemblage, all apparently deeply interested in the sports which are taking place at the foot of their post of vantage. The occupants of a couple of drags, and perhaps a dozen or so of carriages, from which the horses have been taken out, a small posse of horsemen, and a somewhat more numerous gathering of pedestrians, constitute the little crowd. The carriages are chiefly tenanted by ladies, while

the men who lounge upon the drags are unmistakably for the most part soldiers. In the background are pitched a couple of marquees. One of these seems dedicated to perpetual lunch, and numerous are the fair visitors who in turns abandon their carriages to make acquaintance with the lobster salads, mayonnaise, &c., contained within its hospitable walls; the other is given up to the costuming of the gentlemen riders, for these people are congregated for the purpose of celebrating the regimental steeplechases of H.M.'s —th Hussars, an annual fête day which that jovial corps considered could be only properly solemnised by inviting all the neighbourhood around their station to join in a gigantic picnic. Granted propitious weather, and this was usually a most enjoyable outing, both for themselves and their guests, as a picnic, with pleasant people, plenty to eat and drink of the best, and something to amuse, is sure to be.

Very different from the ordinary race

meeting, there is neither stand nor betting-ring. The blatant professional layer against everything and everybody is conspicuous by his absence only. The judge's box is a four-wheeled dog-cart, the stewards' stand a waggon. But there is plenty of wagering going on quietly amongst the dragoons themselves and the sporting gentlemen of the district; those hard-riding young farmers, too, have been hunting alongside the soldiers all last season, have their own opinions of what both men and horses can do, and back their judgment freely amongst each other, so that there is no lack of the excitement which moderate speculation gives to the spectators at such carnivals.

But the race of the day is about to be run, and for awhile there is a cessation of lunch and flirtation. The men—aye, and the women too, for many of the latter have seen the competitors constantly in the hunting-field—eagerly discuss yet again the chances of their favourites. I fear the

ladies, in this case, allow their partiality to obscure their judgment, plunging desperately, as regards gloves, on some popular cavalier, without much reference to what he may ride; still, both amongst those in trailing robes of silk and those in broadcloth; amongst amazons in short-skirted habits; amongst wiry tough men in Melton cords and butcher boots; or amongst the moustached gentlemen in pot hats and ulsters, who are smoking so assiduously on the tops of the drags; there seems to be a conviction that Wilful Kate should about win.

The men are all full of how young Cherriton, her owner, was the one man with the hounds during that famous hour and fifty minutes from Oxenby Gorse, just before last Christmas, when neither master nor huntsman ever succeeded in getting within hail, and the pack ran into their fox and killed without assistance. Then again, some of the hunt recall that day when the fox, slipping them, crossed Hazingley Brook, and how Jim

Hawksbury, on that occasion riding Wilful Kate, set the field. There is no doubt but the mare can jump and stay, still there is also a suspicion abroad that she has a temper.

"Mr. Hawksbury, come here for one moment, if you please," cried a young lady, muffled in the richest sables, and seated in a stately, albeit somewhat old-fashioned, barouche. "I want to speak to you."

The gentleman addressed turned his head, then raising his low-crowned felt hat, reined up the clever, short-legged bay cob he was riding by the side of the carriage.

A stout, thick-set, broad-shouldered man, of fifty-five or thereabouts, sitting his horse squarely, like a man well accustomed to the saddle, clad in a riding-coat of Oxford mixture, darkish cords, and boots reaching to the knee. He wore a starched white scarf with a neat gold pin, but beyond that there was nothing to denote his clerical profession. Yet the Rev. Robert Hawksbury preached twice a week as surely as

he hunted three times in the season, and was wont to boast that he was never late for a marriage, a funeral, a dinner, or at the cover-side.

"Delighted to see you, Miss Auriole!" he exclaimed, a bright smile suffusing his jolly, rubicund visage, as he shook hands. "What chance has brought you from the Wolds to grace the Muddlebury neighbourhood?"

"I might ask the same of you," rejoined the young lady, laughing. "Allow me to introduce you to my hostess, Lady Dampier."

The Rev. Robert raised his hat, as he replied: "Don't you know there's a Hawksbury going to venture his neck in this next race, and that the lad's the best hands and seat of the family. I wasn't bad in my day, Miss Auriole, and they'll tell you, can hold my own now amongst the welters, when hounds are running; but Jim's better than I ever was."

"You know you ought never to have been good in that way," retorted Miss

Auriole. "It is a wonder the Bishop doesn't speak to you."

"Don't be saucy, Letty," rejoined Robert Hawksbury, chuckling. "Just at present I'm looking after my nephew, and another parishioner, apparently. If he and she lead their pastor into all the iniquity of a race-course, he cannot help himself—he is bound to look after his flock."

"Most especially that terrible Fox family, in which he takes such preposterous and unreasonable interest," replied Miss Auriole, her eyes dancing with fun; "but, Mr. Hawksbury, will Jim win to-day, do you think?"

"Well, I know nothing about this mare he's going to ride beyond I saw her this morning, and can affirm she's a rare good-looking one, and fit to go. She showed the whites of her eyes, and laid her ears back once or twice in a way I don't altogether like; but they say, though a puller, she's not to be called a bad-tempered one. At all events,

they are very sanguine of success ; that is to say, both Jim and his friend Mr. Cherriton. Good-bye for the present. I must go down to see the start ; " and lifting his hat, the sporting rector cantered easily away.

Letty Auriole gazed somewhat inquisitively after him as he departed. A fine, clear, intelligent face, though certainly not to be called a handsome one ; quick, vivacious gray eyes ; strong, regular white teeth, set in a somewhat large mouth ; and heavy masses of dusky-brown hair, braided low over her forehead, made the girl, to some extent, striking ; yet she had scarce ever been called good-looking, but for one thing : Letty Auriole was an heiress. She was a beauty by inheritance of acres—a belle in virtue of her income. Young ladies of fortune enjoy the prerogative of never being supposed deficient in personal charms ; but there was never one less blinded by flattery on this point than Letty. A keen physiognomist would have said : You will impose upon that

girl only through her affections. Once powerfully interest those, and all women are alike blind; till you do that, if our science is not utterly worthless, she will read you pretty clearly.

She is excited about this race. She has known all the Hawksbury family from childhood, and Jim Hawksbury, who is about to ride this mare with the ill-omened name, has been her playmate in days gone by. She has not seen much of him since he joined the service, but still they have met occasionally, and Letty rather admires her old companion, and is strongly impressed with his horsemanship. In a sporting county that means a good deal, and can you but hold your own in the drawing-room you start with several points in hand. Prowess in the hunting-field counts with the dames of the shires, much as prowess in the tilt-yard did with those of the days of bluff King Hal.

Not very far from the waggon at the foot

of the knoll, which does duty as the stewards' stand, a wiry bay mare is being saddled for the coming encounter. She lathers slightly, and lashes out occasionally in a fretful fashion, that keeps the little knot of by-standers, who are looking on at her toilet, in a state of much liveliness and commotion. Indeed, so restless is that bay mare, it seems, shift position as you may, there is no keeping clear of her heels if you linger in her vicinity. Two gentlemen, standing a little apart, are contemplating her vagaries with looks of extreme dissatisfaction.

"It is most unlucky, Jim," said the shorter of the two, a fresh-looking boy of twenty, whose usual cheery face is now most ominously overcast; "but there's no disguising it, the training has proved a little too much for her; the jade's been showing temper for the last ten days; not that I have bothered her with schooling, she doesn't want that; but she's turned awkward in her gallops. She always did pull a bit, but now

she either tears at her bit like a mad thing, or sulks."

"I am afraid, young 'un, you've overdone it a little; given her a trifle more work than was good for her. However, it can't be helped. We'll have a run for our money, anyway, and if she will but go kind I shall be bad to beat."

"When things do go wrong they always do it with a vengeance," continued young Cherriton, dolefully. "If I hadn't sprained my wrist I'd have ridden her myself. Of course, I know, Jim, you're a better man than I am, a good deal; but when she gets into her tantrums like this she'll sometimes go with me, though she won't with anyone else."

"Well," rejoined Jim Hawksbury, laughing, "I'm sure I wish you could, for I don't look forward to a pleasant ride, I can tell you; and if she does get away with me, I shall be satisfied if I come well out of it."

"She'll be the very deuce to hold to-day,"

observed the proprietor of Wilful Kate, ruefully, as that queer-tempered quadruped lashed out with somewhat extra viciousness at her circle of admirers. "But come along, Jim; off with your coat; it is time you were up."

Jim Hawksbury leisurely divests himself of his overcoat, and appears in his smart, orange-silk racing jacket—a slight, well-knit fellow, rather above the middle height, clean shaven all but his dark moustache, a good resolute face, and bold black eye, lips slightly compressed just now, as if in anticipation of being engaged in an awkward piece of work shortly. Another minute or two, and he is on the back of Wilful Kate. For a few seconds the mare refuses to move; then, as if ashamed of herself, walks quietly away to join her fellow-competitors.

"She looks as if she meant to behave herself, after all," cried Cherriton. "Keep your eye on Traveller, and humour her; we

may be happy yet;" with which parting advice the Chirper (it was his nickname in the corps) betook himself in search of some eligible place from which to witness the coming struggle.

There were just half-a-dozen runners for the —th Hussar Regimental Cup, and of these six, three seemed almost equal favourites. The regiment themselves principally believed in Captain Boulder's Traveller—a big, slashing brown horse, who, in the hands of his practised owner, had carried off one or two minor steeplechases. The gentlemen of the surrounding hunts for the most part pinned their faith in a handsome gray, that had been sold to the Colonel by one of themselves a few months back, with an eye to his winning this very race; while the farmers had a strong fancy for Wilful Kate —not quite so well acquainted, these last, with the queer temper of Mr. Cherriton's mare as his brother-officers; true, they had seen her a bit fractious in the hunting-field

at times, but had never beheld her in what her owner termed her tantrums.

As they walk slowly down to the post, Jim Hawksbury makes up his mind that this race, as far as he is concerned, must be run more in accordance with Wilful Kate's humour than with his own judgment. If she can be coaxed into doing her best, he fears nothing but Traveller. Between Boulder and himself he thinks it will be a fine point; but, as Jim murmurs to himself, with a grin, "I may have the luck to leave him in the water; the Traveller has no *spécialité* for brooks."

The flag falls, and a slight murmur from the knoll proclaims that they are off, the gray leading; but before they reach the first fence Jim Hawksbury comes to the front, and crashes through it a good four lengths in advance, safe over, though the mare jumped in slovenly fashion; but it is manifest to young Cherriton and other observers that Jim can hardly hold her, and that he is

making running as a lesser evil than fighting with his horse. The Chirper's face falls again. Though he has backed Wilful Kate for a good bit of money, it isn't that; he has set his heart upon winning the regimental cup, and it has been sore disappointment to him that his accident prevented his riding himself. The way the mare took that first jump showed an unpleasant tendency to gallop through the fences, and the Chirper is quite aware that is one of her peculiarities when her temper is upset. "The brute," he muttered; "she'll not only lose us our money, but break Jim's neck. How I wish I'd struck her out, and never asked him to ride;" with which reflection he jumped upon the wheel of an adjoining carriage to obtain a better view.

"How do you do, Mr. Cherriton?" said Lady Dampier. "I trust you have come to witness the triumph of your mare, and to enable us to be the first to congratulate you. Let me introduce you to Miss Auriole."

"Mr. Hawksbury is an old friend of mine," said that young lady, bowing, "so I assure you I have a strong interest in the success of Wilful Kate."

"I can only say I am awfully sorry to hear it," rejoined the Chirper, lugubriously. "She looks more like breaking Jim's collar-bone, just now, than winning;" and as he spoke he thought it would be well if the race terminated no more seriously for his unfortunate jockey.

Jim Hawksbury, meanwhile, was quite aware that he had not been very far from a fall at the first fence; his mare, it is true, was pulling very hard, but still he had no intention of risking such another slovenly performance on Wilful Kate's part without interposing. As they came to the next jump he let her feel the spurs pretty sharply; the effect was electrical; she cleared it with plenty to spare, but in the next field Jim felt the mare was away with him. On she went, jumping beautifully; no more

slurring of her fences, but at the same time Jim had lost nearly all control over her. He could just manage to keep her in the course, but that was all, and how long he would even possess power to guide her Jim felt was rather problematical, depending pretty much upon which of them got beat first. Before two miles had been accomplished, Wilful Kate was lying about a quarter of a mile in front of the rest of the field, still pulling hard and fencing magnificently. The younger riders began to feel a little flurried at Hawksbury's portentous lead. Notably does young Clarkson, who is riding the Colonel's gray, begin to think it time to endeavour to diminish the gap between Wilful Kate and himself. The wily and veteran Boulder, hero of scores of steeplechases, who is lying well off, gives a grim chuckle as he sees his companions quicken their pace, "pumping their horses out to catch a runaway who never can get to the winning-post," mutters the Captain.

For that experienced jockey had divined, after a very little, the reason of the terrific running that Hawksbury was making, and knew perfectly well that no animal ever foaled could last at that pace for three miles and a half.

"I must congratulate you, Mr. Cherriton!" exclaims Lady Dampier. "Your mare looks really as if she would come in alone."

The Chirper shot a glance of unmitigated contempt at the speaker, and once more betook himself to studying the struggle before him.

Miss Auriole saw the glance.

"Lend me your glasses a moment!" she exclaimed, hurriedly, to her hostess. After gazing through them steadfastly for a few seconds, she turned sharply, and said: "I don't wonder you do not look sanguine, Mr. Cherriton; if I know anything about it, your mare has overpowered her rider."

Cherriton nodded.

"Got clean away with him, Miss Auriole.

He's no more hold of her this minute than you or I have."

"And what do you think will be the result?" inquired the young lady, as the colour faded out of her cheeks.

"Of course one can't say; but she'll probably run herself completely out in another half mile or so, and, as soon as she's beat, gallop straight into a fence without an effort to jump it."

"Which means an awkward fall for Mr. Hawksbury," said Miss Auriole, anxiously.

The Chirper gave an imperceptible nod, and once more devoted his attention to the race.

Wilful Kate has just taken a stiff stake and binder in superb style, and landed in the one ploughed field of the course. Ere they are half-way across Jim fancies the fierce strain upon his wrists relaxes; before they come to the next fence he tries a strong pull; the iron jaws give way at last, and he knows that his mare is once more in hand.

Only likely to be somewhat too much in hand, thinks Jim, as he marks the sober fashion in which the wilful one disposes of her next jump.

There is but one thing for it now, and that is to nurse the mare carefully to the finish. She may last ridden in that way. Then, again, he has a long lead, and it will take his adversaries some little time to catch him yet. Meanwhile, he is coming to the brook, and reflects that his chance of being "left in the water" is as good as that of Captain Boulder's. Wilful Kate falters in her stride as she nears it, and Jim's resolution is taken at once. It will be cheaper, he thinks, to go in at once, rather than risk a bad fall by driving a pumped mare at a big jump. He kicks his feet clear of the stirrups, pulls his mare up into a mere canter, and then they plop quietly into the middle of the water. It is an artificial brook, and, as Jim conjectured, of no depth. He does not even come off. A few seconds, and he and Wilful

Kate scramble out on the other side, both, if anything, rather freshened by their ducking. Still, of course, he has lost ground, and he is now progressing at very moderate speed. He looks anxiously back, and sees that his antagonists are rapidly closing with him. Perhaps the brook may dispose of some few of them, though he can see, at all events, the Colonel's gray and the black jacket of Boulder are safe over, and these are the two most dangerous of his opponents. However, he fancies his mare is galloping stronger from his judicious nursing; he is still in front, and it is possible when they come up alongside that neither the Traveller nor Gray Bertram may prove to have much left in them.

As Jim Hawksbury rounds the final turn for home, and comes into the straight run in, Gray Bertram races up to him. Clarkson, who is riding the Colonel's nag, is by no means a bad horseman, but, like most young jockeys, is in rather too great a hurry

to get to the winning-post. They have only about half-a-mile to go now, over four large grass fields—old swath—what hunting men would call real galloping ground, and Clarkson thinks it time to take up the running. Jim resigns his lead without a struggle, but eyes the gray keenly.

"I shall catch him again," he mutters; "he has not a great deal left in his horse, and cannot afford to take liberties," and Jim throws an anxious glance over his shoulder to see who may be his immediate followers. Not much cause to trouble his head as far as three of them are concerned, for one is still the wrong side of the brook, and two more are hopelessly beaten off; but the Traveller is creeping up to him fast, and evidently has plenty of go left in him.

Now, Jim knew pretty well that his mare had the speed of the Traveller, and though she was somewhat beat, he thought, if he could wait till he got quietly over the last fence, and then make a race of it from there,

he might win. But the astute Boulder was equally alive to this view of the situation, and had not the slightest intention of finishing the contest to suit Wilful Kate. The Captain, in fact, felt fairly confident of winning; he knew that his horse was the freshest of the three between whom the race now laid, and no sooner was he over the last fence but one than he immediately took advantage of this circumstance, and sent the Traveller along. Jim felt he must keep with him or be beat. Gray Bertram is leading some four lengths, but the Captain nearly catches him as they come to the last fence, and Wilful Kate is barely a couple of lengths behind.

"A good race!" cry the spectators, and all three horses are proclaimed as winning by their respective partisans. Two top the jump, and then comes a thud and a crash, and Wilful Kate and her jockey roll over into the winning field and lie motionless.

A woman's shriek breaks from a little

knot of lookers-on who had assembled at the last fence to see the finish, and it is rumoured that a young lady has fainted—in truth, Hawksbury's fall was bad to look upon. The mare had been more beat than Jim supposed; the quickened pace of the last field had completely finished her, and when she came to the jump she made no attempt to rise, but galloped straight into it.

Assistance, of course, there was plenty of. Without waiting to see the triumph of the Traveller by two easy lengths, the Chirper sprang from the wheel of Lady Dampier's carriage, but ere his feet had well touched the ground, his steps were arrested by Miss Auriole's voice.

"Mr. Cherriton," she murmured, turning white even to her very lips, "you will promise to come back and let me know what has happened to Mr. Hawksbury exactly, won't you? I'm afraid it's a very bad fall; neither of them got up."

Miss Auriole was right; it is an ominous

sign when horse and rider lie where they fall. In this instance Wilful Kate was too done to move, her hapless jockey simply insensible.

"Rely upon me," replied the Chirper, tersely, and sped down the hill as fast as his legs could carry him.

Half an hour or so elapsed, and even Lady Dampier, albeit a somewhat unobservant old lady, began to think Miss Auriole a little incoherent in her conversation, when Cherriton returned.

"Jim's a good deal shook, but he's come to himself again now, though still rather hazy. The doctors don't think there's anything serious, as far as they can see; but the arm—his bridle arm—is broke. Still, Miss Auriole, that will mend, and I don't think he's much to fear beyond the tedium of a sick room."

"Thank you so much," replied the young lady, with a bright smile; "it looked such a bad fall, I couldn't help feeling anxious. I

must say good-bye now. Our horses have been in some time, and we were only waiting for your report to go home."

The Chirper raised his hat and walked off in a meditative manner to the luncheon tent. Wilful Kate's misconduct, he considered, required to be washed down with a glass of sherry.

"They're queer things, women," muttered the young philosopher, "and I don't profess to understand 'em; but I don't fancy, as a rule, they turn as white as Miss Auriole did when a fellow gets a cropper, unless he's a husband, brother, or sweetheart. It's quite clear Jim can't stand in the light of either of the first two to her," and the Chirper, tossing down his sherry, indulged in a wink expressive of much sagacity.

CHAPTER II.

"BY THE SALT WATERS."

Mr. Cherriton proved a true prophet. Little more than a week has elapsed since Jim Hawksbury was carried home senseless from the regimental steeplechases, and now he sits smoking in a state of much despondency at his window in Muddlebury barracks. He looks somewhat pale, and his left arm is in a sling and carefully bandaged, otherwise you would say there was nothing much the matter with him now. Yet his face seems worn and wearied. The doctors are, in fact, a little puzzled about Jim, and say his system wants tone. The truth is, he does not recover from his accident as at his

age he should do, and the why completely baffles them. His arm is going on most satisfactorily ; they can discover no other injury beyond external cuts and bruises ; still, it is evident the patient is in a state of mental depression. Concussion of the brain, whisper the faculty, and the more they consider that view of Jim's case the less can they arrive at a conclusion regarding it.

But it was reserved for Mr. Cherriton to clear up the mystery, which that precocious young gentleman did in a fashion all his own. The Chirper was at that blessed time of life when we believe implicitly in our boyhood's idols. His faith in Jim Hawksbury's horsemanship, for instance, was unbounded ; indeed he had much general belief in his brother-subaltern, but in a medical point of view his trust was placed in a certain Alec Donaldson, who had nursed him through a nasty touch of typhoid fever some four years previously. The Chirper would have smiled compassion-

ately had you suggested, that any of the leaders of the profession in town were to compare with his somewhat obscure friend Donaldson.

"It's all bosh," observed the Chirper to himself one morning, as he walked away from Hawksbury's rooms; "Jim's got no more concussion of the brain than I have. Jim's moped, bored, consumedly bored, and no wonder at it—contemplating Muddlebury barrack-square for ten days would take the bloom off my spirits, to say nothing of his broken arm and the general demoralisation produced by a regular crumpler. He must go away, of course he must. When the doctors tell you there's a want of tone, they mean your constitution requires a fillip, and when you want a fillip, it means of course you want a lark. If Jim isn't quite up to a lark yet, he is fit for a change at all events."

Mr. Cherriton's ideas of a change, as concerned himself, usually took the form

of a round of the London theatres, and sundry suppers at Evans's, &c., supplemented by breathing the invigorating air of Cremorne till as much past "the witching hour of night" as could be indulged in, compatible with the paternal legislation of our degenerate times; but he was quite aware that this was far too powerful a panacea for Jim Hawksbury in his present state. Having, however, arrived at the conclusion that change of air was what his friend wanted, the Chirper, in most illogical fashion, came to the conclusion that sea air was the desideratum. "If you can't take your fillip in one form, Jim, you must in another," argued Mr. Cherriton. "You want ozone: Burnside, now, is famous for its ozone. Besides, Alec Donaldson, the cleverest medico in all England, lives there. Combine change of air with change of doctors, you see. Bless you, Alec and Burnside will set you up in no time."

Hawksbury's medical attendants cordially

concurred in a change being advisable, though strenuously insisting upon quiet as absolutely necessary. Well, there were few quieter spots than the little watering-place Cherriton had suggested, and a few days more saw Jim comfortably established there. Donaldson, in whose hands he placed himself, really was a clever man. He pronounced the Muddlebury doctors right in their conjecture; there had, no doubt, been slight concussion of the brain, but at the same time he saw no reason for alarm. All such cases required quiet, and Burnside was just the place for his patient; let him lounge about and do nothing, he could not do better. And, in truth, Jim Hawksbury was fain to own that was about as much as he was at present fit for. He, naturally a most energetic man, was now well content to sit for hours and watch the lazy waters as they rippled on the shingle. Though it was late in November, the weather was still mild and genial—that short span of steamy

warmth sometimes vouchsafed us before the first fierce outbreak of winter. Jim passed much of his time in the open air.

Lounging one morning after his usual custom on the promenade, he became conscious that he was attracting the attention of two strangers. To study those who are studying us, is a common instinct of humanity; it was but natural that Jim should devote himself to observing the pair who apparently took such an interest in him.

A gentlemanly man about fifty, whose hair and beard were freely grizzled, dark eyes looking keenly out from a face which showed traces of habitual ill-health. His companion was a good-looking girl of seventeen, or thereabouts, straight as a pine and supple as a willow in her lithe, well-rounded figure; the dark eyes, olive complexion, and strong likeness existing between them clearly indicated their close relationship.

The strangers and Jim passed some half-

dozen times on the promenade, eyeing one another with the peculiar intentness which is observable amongst those who dwell by the salt waters. Why it is so I can't say; but the man who goes on his way in a big city, paying little heed to the concerns of his neighbour, becomes absorbed in the business of that neighbour should he encounter him by the sea-side. Away from his accustomed occupation, from sheer *ennui*, he adopts Mr. Pollaky's business, I presume, and literally and emphatically keeps an eye upon those who cross his track.

At length, as the strangers once more met Hawksbury, the gentleman raised his hat and courteously hoped that Jim had nearly recovered from his fall.

"Thanks," replied the dragoon. "I am getting all right again, now; but I was a good deal shaken, and indeed broken at the time. Might I ask how you came to know of my mishap?"

"As it took place a good way from this,

and you never set eyes on my daughter or myself before," interrupted the stranger, with a smile. "We were spectators of your accident; standing, in fact, at the very fence where it occurred."

"Ah," replied Jim, gaily, and addressing himself to the young lady, "I'm afraid I made a most unfavourable first appearance."

"It was terrible to look at," said the girl, with a slight shiver. "It makes me feel sick to think of it, even now."

"Yes, Mr. Hawksbury, it was a bad fall to look at. I really thought myself that you were killed. As for Clarisse here, she fainted outright."

"I really regret," returned Jim, gallantly, "that I should have so upset your nerves; but it was not my fault the mare was beat."

"I've some recollection in my own hunting days," observed the stranger, dryly, "of having it drilled into me that the man who rode a beaten horse at a fence was responsible if grief came of it."

Jim Hawksbury turned, rather sharply, upon the speaker. Few gentlemen riders can bear to hear their performance disparaged, and to be lectured about his riding of Wilful Kate by an utter stranger was more than the hussar could submit to, but before he had time to reply, a soft voice interposed :

"It would be only fair to Mr. Hawksbury, papa, if you told him who we are. At present we have the advantage of him in that respect."

"Quite right, Clarisse. Let me introduce myself—Alfred Lydon, artist. Staying here just now for the benefit of the sea air, but my head-quarters are in town."

"I can only hope it is doing you as much good as it is me," replied Jim, as he turned up the promenade with his new friends.

That the acquaintance thus formed should progress rapidly was little to be wondered at. Hawksbury knew nobody else in Burnside but his doctor. The Lydons were

similarly situated; the very dulness of the place threw them together. As Jim said afterwards: "I went in for quiet, and by Jove I got it. Doncaster, the week after the Leger, is tumultuous compared with Burnside." Still the perfect quiet, joined with the change of air, had been the very thing he required in the first instance, and now the society of the Lydons amused without fatiguing him. Jim was progressing rapidly towards complete recovery.

Alfred Lydon was somewhat of a mystery to Hawksbury. The artist had seen much of life, and his keen, caustic remarks on men and manners amused the young man exceedingly; still, although it was evident that he was narrating personal experiences, he never claimed to have been an actor in the scenes he described. The curious part of this to Jim was, that his allusions sometimes had reference to that section of the London world who devote themselves in these days to Hurlingham and Princes, and wage battle

so fiercely at Epsom and Ascot. That he spoke correctly concerning it, albeit of a time before polo was, and ere the sublime conception of roller-skates had entered the brain of their inventor, Jim knew quite enough of the past history of that world to feel assured; yet according to his own account, he was simply an artist, whose home was in Canada, and whose sole errand in England was to escape the greater severity of a Canadian winter.

From Clarisse Lydon Jim gathered little more. Her father was an Englishman, but he had married and settled in Lower Canada, and till they had crossed the seas upon their present errand she had never been out of that country. Her mother had been dead about two years, since which she had kept house for her father, leaving the convent, where she was at school indeed, for that purpose.

When Jim inquired how it was they happened to be present at the steeplechase,

Lydon replied, briefly, "That he had known all that part of the world well in days gone by, and having a curiosity to see it again, made a small tour through it before going to Burnside. Being in Muddlebury, we, of course, heard of the races, and so went out to see them. I had a taste that way once, and know a horse or horseman when I see him. That was a good mare you rode there, and would have about won could you have held her at starting." Concerning his English life, or of what part of the country he belonged to, Lydon never spoke more plainly than this. It contrasted strangely with the openness with which he talked of the latter or Canadian portion of his career; and yet, as a rule, it is the days of their early manhood that men most love to look back upon. Days, it may be, of hard work and narrow means; but how we slept, and what spirits and digestions we had in those times.

"And to-morrow you leave Burnside!" exclaimed Clarisse Lydon, as she and

Hawksbury paced the little promenade, with the quick step the keenness of a closing November day demanded; for whatever warmth may be in the weather towards the end of autumn, it dies with the sun.

"Yes; it has been a very pleasant fortnight, and done me no end of good. I feel quite set up again. Do you know I think that you and your father have assisted my convalescence not a little."

"How so?" said the young lady.

"Well, you see, I was on the verge of getting moped when you took compassion on me, and inquired into my case," returned Hawksbury, laughing.

"Nonsense," retorted Clarisse, "you had your friend Mr. Donaldson to talk to; and I'm sure he is excellent company."

"Undoubtedly; but then, you see, Donaldson has his patients to look after, and, from what I see of the practice, that involves considerably more time than profit. I should have had little of his companion-

ship till after dinner; and even then, as he says, the extra-parochials send for him sometimes because they're so bored they think they must be ill."

"Ah, life here must be somewhat stagnant without employment; but I feel flattered to think we have been of service to you."

"Indeed you have. Without the companionship of yourself and Mr. Lydon, I should not have derived a quarter of the benefit!" exclaimed Jim, warmly.

"I think you have done papa good, too. Do you know, I never heard him talk to anyone as he has done to you. Of course, I don't understand half you say when you speak of all that fashionable London life, and I had no idea papa knew anything about it either."

"He has known it well in bygone years, Miss Lydon," replied Jim. "Of course, his time was before mine there; but I have heard enough of the past, on various occa-

sions, to feel sure he mixed freely in it once."

"Well, mind you come and see us at Kensington, as you've promised. Remember, I am in a similar case there to you here—knowing no one, and in sad danger of getting moped. Would not that be terrible?" cried the girl, laughing.

"I shall be only too glad. But don't forget, I don't live in town, and only visit it at intervals."

"I am aware, sir, of the onerous duties you owe to the State," replied Miss Lydon, with a saucy smile; "but when Broadshire and the adjacent counties seem sufficiently tranquil, we shall trust that you will honour the metropolis."

Jim raised his hat as he replied, in a similar sportive strain: "Miss Lydon's lightest wish is a command. I shall look forward to presenting myself in South Kensington soon after Christmas."

"That will be good of you. And now,

really, I think I must go in. Will you come too, and have some tea?"

"No, thanks. I promised Donaldson to be home betimes, as it's my last day. I have said good-bye to your father, and now, sad to say, must do the like to you."

"Yes," replied the girl, as she stood facing him. "We've had a very pleasant time here, and papa and I should miss you much if we were staying on, but we also leave on Friday. Don't think, nevertheless, that we shall not look forward to seeing you again. Good-bye is a terrible word to say when there is no prospect of that; however, that is not so in your case," and extending her hand, Miss Lydon looked him frankly in the face.

"God forbid," replied Jim, as he pressed the little hand warmly. "We shall meet again ere many weeks are passed," and then, with a low reverence, Hawksbury took his leave.

"You'll do now," said Donaldson next

morning, as he was seeing his quondam patient off by the train. "The Chirper was right when he sent you to me, insomuch as all you wanted was quiet, fresh air, no doctoring, and to be amused. I'm a poor man, and can't quite afford to be honest, or else I ought to send your fees over to Miss Lydon; she's done you more good than I have."

"Don't be absurd," rejoined Jim, brusquely.

"Can't see I am," retorted Donaldson. "If you didn't find a pretty girl more amusing than your humble adviser, I should have augured very ill of your case. Time you were off though, or you might have taken another complaint—common enough, but quite beyond our power to grapple with."

"Hold your miserable tongue," cried Jim. "Ah, thank Heaven, here's the train."

"Good-bye, old fellow," rejoined Donald-

son, as he exchanged a mighty hand-grip with his charge. "Love to the Chirper, and tell him if he don't send me patients at the rate of half-a-score a quarter, I shall have to betake myself somewhere else—this neighbourhood is far too healthy to support a new medical man."

CHAPTER III.

RINGSTONE ABBEY.

RINGSTONE ABBEY, the seat of the Hawksburys, was a quaint, many-gabled country house, built in the form of an L. It had been originally a long, low mansion, running under seven gables, but about the commencement of the eighteenth century, the then reigning baronet, fancying he required more room, either for his family or his friends, built a short leg on to the old building, and considerably spoilt the picturesque appearance of its many-gabled front—artistic tastes not being very prevalent amongst the hard-riding, hard-drinking country gentlemen of those days,

who were given to patching their houses in most incongruous fashion. It stood in a finely-wooded park, the grand old timber in which had been carefully tended or planted centuries before by the old monks, who were then lords of Ringstone; for the present country house, like many others, had sprung up on the ruins of a monastery, the foundations and fish-ponds of which were still to be traced in some broken ground no great distance beyond the shrubberies. The Hawksburys, indeed, dated their appearance in Broadshire from the days when the monasteries went down. They had probably little more ardour for the Reformed Faith than their sovereign liege, or many other zealous reformers of those days; but they were a needy, rapacious race, and when such a very fat goose as the church of those times was to be plucked, were little likely to be absent from the plucking. At all events, a certain Ralph Hawksbury and his two sons are

recorded to have been very active in the dissolution of the monasteries in those parts, and to have obtained a considerable assignment of the lands appertaining to the Abbey of Ringstone, which they had been at some pains to destroy, in acknowledgment of the zeal they had displayed.

It was a queer, somewhat inconvenient, old house, as most old houses are. Antiquity and comfort are by no means synonymous terms, and our ancestors not only sat in vile, straight-backed chairs, which, either from ignorance or cynicism, they called easy, but were content to do without many appurtenances which we nowadays deem necessities. Baths and bath-towels, for instance, were superfluities of which our forefathers had never heard. Ringstone was neither much better nor much worse than other old dwellings of its kind. Its owners had from time to time modernised its furnishing, and adopted the latest improvements of the age—created a

smoking-room, for example, filled with lounges that might satisfy a lotus-eater; but the great glory of Ringstone was its hall, a large, square-shaped apartment, floored and panelled with dark oak running from basement to roof-tree, and with nothing but a gallery, which traversed three sides of it midway, to break its height. Fitted up in all respects like a drawing-room, the family habitually sat in this room, the front door being fenced off by a screen, which ran up to the bottom of the gallery on that side.

"So we are to have Jim home to dinner!" exclaimed a dark, vivacious little lady, who was busying herself with some water-colours near the fireplace. "I suppose it was a nasty fall to look at, eh, Letty?"

Miss Auriole raised her eyes from her book, and paused a moment before she replied. "I don't pretend," she said at length, "to really ride to hounds like you,

Sara; still, you know, I often go hunting in my own milder fashion. I've seen falls before, but I never saw man and horse go down like that. I felt a little like fainting; I really thought he was killed."

"Stupid boy, I've no patience with him," cried the other. "I intend to scold him well when he arrives. What business had he to ride the first wretch he was asked to? I don't understand his lingering so long at Burnside. It's not like Jim to be content with a quiet watering-place. I cannot help fearing that he is not so far recovered as he says."

"Mr. Cherriton, when he wrote just after the accident, said Jim was much shaken generally; remember——"

"Yes, and that reminds me that I shall have something to say to Mr. Cherriton about his asking my brother to risk his neck on that ill-tempered brute," replied Miss Hawksbury, with a sharp, quick nod of her head. "He's a special crony of Jim's,

and has been coming here twice, only something prevented him. So I don't suppose it will be long before we meet."

"I'm sure he looked unhappy enough during the race, and was anticipating what occurred from the moment he saw his mare had got away with her rider."

"That's what I blame him for," retorted Miss Hawksbury, imperiously. "He should have had his anticipations sooner, and not persuaded Jim to chance life and limb in his service. What, Uncle Robert!" exclaimed the young lady, springing to her feet as the door opened and admitted the rector's stalwart figure. "Why are you not at Rickerby Gate?"

"Ah, very sad, Sara, isn't it? Such a scent as there'll be this morning, too. However, it couldn't be; I'd a parish meeting to see to, and have a funeral at three, or else I should have come across to know if either of you wanted an escort."

"He's getting better the last year or two,

Letty, and don't turn up his nose at a lane as he used to do, or else I assure you, being escorted by Uncle Robert necessitated real hard riding, to keep one's escort in sight."

It would have been difficult to say which had the more profound contempt for following the hounds in that fashion, uncle or niece, yet they always affected to be given to so doing.

"Nonsense," cried the rector, with a jolly laugh. "You know better, Miss Auriole. When the cloth does take a look at the hounds, it always restricts itself to the use of gates, gaps, and byways."

"Only in theory, I am afraid," replied Letty, smiling. "I have seen the poor sheep, at times, sore put to it to follow their shepherd."

The Rev. Robert Hawksbury, Rector of Ringstone, and only brother of Sir Randolph Hawksbury, Bart., of Ringstone Abbey, in the county of Broadshire, was a type of parish priest fast disappearing. The better

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men of this kind lived upon excellent terms with their parishioners, and did a great deal of good after their own lights. Not much given to schools, or the celebration of saints' days, it is true; but interesting themselves considerably in the secular concerns of those under their care. Free of advice, and unsparing of censure; more anxious, perhaps, for their parishioners' temporal than spiritual welfare. The worst men of this type of parson generally betook themselves to drink and all manner of uncleanness; but these clergy of the days gone by are not to be judged by the black sheep that were among them.

Robert Hawksbury was extremely popular with his flock. He not only knew them, but pretty well all their concerns, talked confidentially over what was to be done with Bill or Maggie when they were a little older. "Set" the store pig, *i.e.*, estimated what it would weigh, or advised about pruning the fruit-trees. There was

no better judge of ricking, thatching, hedging, ditching, underdraining, &c., in all the country-side than the Rev. Robert, and he was constantly appointed arbiter of such points at the agricultural meetings in the neighbourhood. If he had a rough tongue for what he considered the peccadilloes—and he utterly ignored a good many that more modern clergymen would weep over—they knew him to be free of hand and kind of heart in time of trouble. If the young men of Ringstone preferred cricket to church on a Sunday afternoon, they were little likely to be lectured by their rector. He could by no means be brought to see cruelty in cockfighting, holding with Chrysippus that "cockfighting was the final cause of cocks," and held privately that poaching was the one sin a man could scarce make atonement for. He was a keen sportsman, and though he might joke about gates and gaps, and use them, too, on

occasion—no one in the hunt having greater knowledge on those points—yet scarce anyone went straighter when hounds were running in earnest. Another faculty, too, he had, and it is one which the poor invariably regard with much veneration—shrewdness. It was very difficult indeed to humbug the Rev. Robert. He knew the domestic affairs of his flock too well forsooth for that—could put his finger on drunken men, or feckless women, as cause of want or destitution, or explain that Hodge's garden failed to yield for want of Hodge's work put into it. For the rest, he always displayed a most laudable curiosity on the subject of "birds" and foxes, seldom failing to introduce inquiry concerning them into his speech, and preached two sermons a week, which it is to be feared contained but one point of an excellent discourse—namely, brevity. The Rev. Robert, wiser than this garrulous generation, knew that he figured to small

advantage in the pulpit, a circumstance that those privileged to occupy it seldom seem conscious of.

"Well," continued the rector, after a short pause, "you'll have Jim to take care of you out hunting now for a spell."

"Unless his accident has changed him a good deal, Jim invariably forgets our very existence as soon as they find," said Miss Hawksbury, laughing.

"It is a failing which runs in the family," exclaimed Miss Auriole. "I've known you desert me, Sara, without compunction under those circumstances."

"It's in the blood, I'm afraid, Letty. We suffer, both Sara and I," continued the rector, with a smile on his lips. "She has misgivings as to whether it's ladylike to be in the first flight, and I as to whether it's clerical; yet we get there at times without meaning it. There never was a Hawksbury yet could stop his horse when hounds were running."

"No scandal about Queen Elizabeth," retorted Sara, her quick black eyes dancing with fun. "When I am there I'm following my Mentor, and very much shocked to find what's come of it."

"Yes, my dear; it's a very sad business all round, and the less we say about it the better. If we ought, as modest men, to be dumb about our merits, as prudent people we'd best be silent on our weaknesses," observed the Rev. Robert, with mock solemnity.

"As if it were possible, when favoured of fortune, to be altogether silent about one's good luck," rejoined Miss Hawksbury, in demure imitation of her uncle's tone. "It is so hard not to crow a wee bit when one has had the best of it."

"Especially when Miss Lambton has had very much the reverse, my dear," interposed Miss Auriole.

At which observation the two burst into a peal of laughter, for Miss Lambton was a

rival Diana, of whom Sara Hawksbury entertained considerable jealousy; and how jealous women can be of each other's horsemanship is scarcely to be conceived.

"Well, I've some justice business to talk over with your father," said the rector, rising, "so good-bye, girls, for the present. I shall look in on you for lunch."

"Do," replied Sara, as Uncle Robert quitted the room.

A shrewd, quick-witted girl was Sara Hawksbury, blessed with high spirits and an excellent constitution. It was wonderful what fatigue that slight, delicate figure could endure. After hours passed in the saddle, her foot would be as light in the dance as her hand had been all day upon the bridle. She never seemed to tire, her spirits never seemed to flag. She was not altogether popular, for her tongue, though never bitter, was a little sharp. It was not that she said biting things or made sarcastic remarks about those she mixed with, but people

had an uneasy impression that she could, if so minded. We have all met with those who are regarded distrustfully on this account. Society always views the power of sarcasm with suspicion, and will pardon inconceivable dulness sooner than the mere thought of becoming its target. But Sara Hawksbury was a warmhearted, sensible girl, and very rarely gave vent to the satiric humour that she undoubtedly possessed, rather addicted to athletics as far as a lady may be, and sometimes filled with slight compunctions that she went perhaps a little too far in such pursuits, but pleading in excuse that she couldn't do things by halves, and that whether it was hunting, skating, dancing, or what not, she did it with all her might—a fault, if it be one, that it would be as well if a good many of us could fall into.

Though a practical girl enough, yet Miss Hawksbury cherished one little bit of romance. She did dearly hope that sooner

or later Letty Auriole and her brother Jim would understand one another. A very desirable arrangement *that*, had thought more Hawksburys than Sara, albeit they kept it pretty much to themselves; but both Sir Randolph and my lady, for a wonder, were of one mind on this point. Uncle Robert, too, with whom both Letty Auriole and his nephew were prime favourites, thought it would do very nicely. The young lady, as before said, possessed a handsome fortune, and, though Jim was heir to Ringstone Abbey, yet the Hawksburys had never been a thrifty race, and the property would be much improved by the clearing off of sundry mortgages. One objection only so far in this little arrangement—to wit, that it never seemed to have occurred to one of those principally interested in its success. The idea had never entered Jim Hawksbury's mind, and had it been suggested to him, that volatile hussar would probably have replied that

he had more important things to think of than marriage, although, if cross-examined, it might have puzzled him somewhat to enumerate them. Still, it is little likely that the scheme will not be brought before him in due course. Sir Randolph is hardly the man to leave anybody in ignorance of his wishes on any point, or to forgive the slightest contravention of them—an indolent despot, not troubling himself as to how things went in his little world as long as they did not interfere with his own whims or comforts; but no more domestic autocrat existed than the cynical easy-going baronet when aroused, and though both his children were tolerably strong-willed, yet they habitually listened to Sir Randolph with considerable respect when he bestirred himself in earnest.

As for Lady Hawksbury, she was an insincere woman, who deemed herself a very Machiavelli in petticoats. Standing in considerable awe of her despotic spouse, and

even in some slight measure of her straightforward son and daughter, she always sought to gain her ends by the most transparent scheming. Her husband would at times look on rather amused at her machinations, at others would ruthlessly and contemptuously expose them. A woman that it was impossible to like, she was so palpably insincere, such social change as she spent was so unmistakably of base metal; even when she really was delighted to see people, and told them so, it sounded like the veriest bit of humbug possible. From always acting a part, she had at last lost all natural character. She was purely artificial as regards her feelings—as complete a psychological sham as some of her compeers, who would fain bloom perennial, are materially. Sooner or later it is plain that Sir Randolph and my lady will interfere, each in their own fashion, in behalf of this alliance that they have decided on for their first-born.

And what might be Letty Auriole's

thoughts on this matter, if thought she had about it? Be that as it may, she kept her own counsel, as modest maiden might; and Sara Hawksbury was far too true-hearted a girl and far too shrewd to seek to force her friend's confidence, or to mar her own pet scheme, by premature hint of the same to either of those concerned. Up to the present the Hawksbury family had all refrained from interference in what appeared to them a most desirable arrangement, but a desire to assist the course of events is so inherent a passion of our nature that it can scarcely be supposed that they will practise such abstinence much longer.

CHAPTER IV.

"IS MISS LYDON PRETTY?"

JIM HAWKSBURY, as we have seen, scoffed at the idea of being smitten by Clarisse Lydon, but he thought a good deal about her all the same as the train whirled him away from Burnside. Thought over their good-bye, and reflected he should have felt very loath to think that they were not to meet again and that soon. Still a man might feel that, and not be the least in danger of entertaining warmer sentiments.

"Fellows always will gabble so if one walks half-a-dozen times with a pretty girl, and insist upon it you're spooning," muttered Jim. "What an ass Donaldson is."

Then he began to reflect that Mr. Cherriton had agreed to meet him on the way and pay his twice-postponed visit to Ringstone, and that he had quite forgotten to write to his mother to tell her he was bringing a friend with him. It didn't matter, he could telegraph, and if he could not it still didn't matter.

London is reached at last; but Jim speeds across from Waterloo to King's Cross, and snatches such "fitful meal" as a railway station permits. A meal at a railway station, like sleep in a railway carriage, is a thing of fits and starts, and the food and the sleep are about equally unsatisfactory. On again, up the Great North Road at a pace that would make the travellers of fifty years ago speechless even to think about, till, with a scream, midst shrieks of "Change here!" the train pulls up at Retford Junction, one of those centres from which travellers branch off in all directions—directions at times most unexpected, such as finding

themselves on their way to Manchester when believing they are journeying to York.

Mid all the bustle and apparent confusion, Jim soon catches sight of Mr. Cherriton, calm and serene, with a well-subsidised porter in charge of his belongings.

"All right, Jim!" exclaimed that gentleman, as he shook hands. "Got room in there. You don't change, which is something to be thankful for. You do, apparently, to get anywhere else, and the variety offered makes selection difficult."

"All right, there you are, my man," continued the Chirper, as he stepped into the carriage. "Main object of the officials here seems to be continually clearing the platform; if they can only get people and portmanteaus into the carriages, it don't matter what becomes of them. By Jove, old fellow, you're beginning to look yourself again."

"Oh, I'm all right. What's the news at Muddlebury? How's the regiment?"

"Muddlebury is in its usual state of unmitigated dulness. I suppose knife-grinding isn't an inspiriting occupation; and that's what Muddlebury gets its living by, you see. I forget how many knives and forks they turn out per annum; but there's no excuse, I know, for anyone eating with their fingers."

"And the regiment?"

"A little low about the near approach of Christmas and its liabilities, otherwise pretty flourishing," replied the Chirper. "Quite resigned to quit Muddlebury at any moment it may please the Horse Guards, in their wisdom, to decree."

"It's not to be called a good quarter," said Jim, "though its being so handy to my own county makes it suit me better than the rest of you."

Beguiling the way with tobacco and regimental gossip, the two friends in due time arrived at Horeby, where a wagonette was awaiting to carry them to Ringstone. As

they entered the hall, Sara sprang forward to welcome her brother, and it was not till he had released himself from her embrace, and shaken hands with Miss Auriole, that Jim was enabled to call their attention to the Chirper, who stood unperceived in the background, regarding what he irreverently described afterwards as "a volcanic eruption of family affection" with his accustomed nonchalance. It took a good deal to disturb that precocious young gentleman's self-possession, but he was a little taken aback by Miss Hawksbury's greeting.

"Very glad indeed to see you, Mr. Cherriton; though I wonder you have the hardihood to trust yourself amongst us so soon."

The cornet bowed as he shook hands, and marvelled greatly what the young lady meant. That he could be remotely connected with having anything to do with Jim's accident never crossed his mind; but he had not much time to think about it,

for there was Lady Hawksbury to be introduced to, who welcomed him with an excess of fervour that made Mr. Cherriton make some mental observations of a trite though scarce complimentary nature; but finally, when she told him she regarded him as her son's preserver, the Chirper, suddenly recanting all his previous convictions, arrived at the conclusion that the good lady was incurably addicted to hoaxing her fellow-creatures.

It was really with some sense of relief that he met Letty Auriole's pleasant "Mr. Cherriton must allow me to claim acquaintance with him, although we met under somewhat unfortunate circumstances near Muddlebury."

"Of course I recollect—that is, it would have been impossible to forget, you know. You lent me a wheel to stand upon. Very good of you, indeed. Yes, shocking business; lost our money, and the mare's never got over it, sad to say."

"To tell the truth," replied Miss Auriole, smiling, "I was thinking of how very near Mr. Hawksbury was *not* getting over it."

"By Jove, yes. What a brute you must think me. I assure you, I was as much cut up about Jim as anyone could be, Miss Auriole; but you see, when one sees him all right again, one forgets all that sort of thing."

Letty Auriole did not feel inclined to charge Mr. Cherriton with selfishness. She had seen how anxious he had been during the race, and knew, as they all knew at Ringstone, how devotedly he had watched by Jim's bedside in those first feverish days that had followed his fall.

But the dressing-bell cut short further conversation, though the Chirper, while conferring with himself over the perfecting of his necktie, as is not unusual with mankind, came to the conclusion that Lady Hawksbury would take a deal of understanding. Miss Hawksbury's speech had

been made clear to him by his subsequent talk with Letty Auriole.

"Well, and what do you think of Mr. Cherriton?" inquired Letty, as the ladies regained the drawing-room after dinner. "Did you have that severe word with him you threatened this morning, when you little thought you were to meet him so soon?"

"He's charming," returned Miss Hawksbury. "Such a thoroughly audacious boy, it would be difficult to be angry with him. It really was very funny to hear his indignation when I rather insinuated that he ought to have ridden such an awkward animal himself, and not have asked Jim to risk his neck."

"Was he very angry?" asked Miss Auriole, smiling.

"Yes, indeed; I began to think I should never pacify him; and had to listen to so long a story of his sprained wrist, and how Jim could ride anything, that I somewhat

repented of my maliciousness. However, we are great friends again now. What did Jim tell you about Burnside? how did he get through his days there?"

"Oh, he said it did him a deal of good, and that he thought Dr. Donaldson clever. Pronounced it stupid, as I should imagine a small watering-place in November would be."

"I hear he picked up some new friends there," rejoined Sara Hawksbury carelessly; "but as he didn't mention them I suppose they didn't interest him much. Lydon, or some such name—artist people—I think Mr. Cherriton said."

The Chirper, although perfectly unaware of the fact, had been under a forcing-pump during the latter part of dinner. His friend Donaldson, in a letter telling him how Hawksbury was improving, had laughingly remarked that his patient had made acquaintance with some people of the name of Lydon, and that a prettier nurse a con-

valescent need not wish for than Miss Lydon. To a remark of Sara's that it was surprising the dulness and solitude of Burnside should have done her brother so much good, Mr. Cherriton had replied that he fancied Jim had found some very agreeable people there. Miss Hawksbury's attention was aroused, and by insidious cross-examination it need be scarcely said she was soon in possession of all the Chirper had to tell her—amounting to very little, it must be owned—but Sara, with her pet project ever in mind, viewed with suspicion every pretty girl who dawned upon her brother's horizon; and on that point Mr. Cherriton was clear, to wit, that Miss Lydon was goodly to look upon.

Letty paid small attention to her friend's remark—not the girl, this, to give her love unsought. It was but natural her cheek should blanch at seeing Hawksbury's fall, when we bear in mind that she had been brought up in the family; and Mr. Cher-

riton was by no means warranted in the deduction he drew upon that occasion. Sir Randolph had been left guardian to Letty, in conjunction with an uncle, by her mother some fifteen years before, but the little girl was by no means an heiress at that time. It was not till the death of her maternal grandfather, which happened about four years previous to the time of which I am writing, that Letty Auriole inherited the hundred thousand pounds of which she was now possessed. Previous to that, she had only the fifteen thousand pounds settled on her mother upon her marriage, and which came to Letty under that settlement.

"Very nice, indeed, of Mr. Cherriton to pay us a visit," interposed Lady Hawksbury. "I believe he was kindness itself to Jim, although he was very near being the death of him. It will be pleasant for you, Letty, to have Jim as a hunting escort, more especially as the doctors won't allow him to ride at present."

My lady was wont to be rather disjointed in her discourse; but, to do her justice, when she said her son was forbidden to ride, she meant from a Hawksbury point of view, moderate equestrian exercise being by no means regarded in such light by that especially hard-riding family.

"Two very prudent cavaliers they are like to be, at present," laughed Miss Hawksbury; "for Mr. Cherriton's wrist is still so weak, he tells me, that he can only really use one hand. I don't fancy they intend to do much in the hunting way, mamma."

The entrance of the gentlemen from the dining-room cut short further speculation as to their future proceedings, and Sara Hawksbury beckoned her brother to a seat by her side, with the design of cross-examining him on his doings at Burnside. Had Jim guessed her intention, it is probable he would have declined her invitation. They were excellent friends, those two; but, without the slightest suspicion of the

reason, it did strike Jim that his sister was most unnecessarily inquisitive concerning his feminine acquaintance. Upon this occasion he had no idea of the knowledge she had come by.

"Burnside seems to have set you up; but you must have found it terribly dull," commenced Miss Hawksbury, insidiously.

"No, not particularly so. I was too upset, you know, to wish for much society," replied her brother, disposing a stray cushion rather more luxuriously for his own accommodation.

"What on earth did you do?"

"What I went there for: looked at the sea, and inhaled the sea-breezes."

"But it must have been so wearisome having no one to speak to."

"Oh, there was Donaldson, you know, and conversation is not quite such a necessity with us as with you."

"Don't be rude, sir," replied Miss Hawksbury. "Dr. Donaldson had his

patients to attend to, so you couldn't talk to him all day."

"No, nor to anyone else," retorted Jim, jesuitically. "I wasn't up to it. I shouldn't have got well if I had. I was ordered to keep quiet."

"You are equivocating, Jim," said Miss Hawksbury, with mock solemnity. "You had better confess at once. Whom did you fraternise with?"

"Oh, the boatmen! Then there was such a jolly old coastguard, Sara."

"That you used to walk up and down the parade with," observed Miss Hawksbury, demurely. "I heard as much."

"Ah, well! If you know all about him, it's no use my going on. No, I wasn't particularly dull, thank you," said Jim, now quite awake to the impending attack.

"Is Miss Lydon pretty?" inquired Sara, abruptly.

"If you'll tell me where she lives I'll

write and inquire," rejoined her brother, with great nonchalance.

"Jim, if there was no one but ourselves here I'd box your ears," whispered Miss Hawksbury, laughing.

"What is it you want to know, you little vixen?"

"Why, all about Miss Lydon, of course."

"Then, why didn't you ask about Miss Lydon at once, instead of beating about the bush in this fashion?"

"Is she pretty?" asked Miss Hawksbury, pertinaciously.

"She's rather nice-looking."

"And pleasant to talk to, I suppose."

"She's a very charming girl, and her father a most amusing man," returned Jim.

"What are they?"

"Canadians. He is an artist; and now really you know as much about them as I do. If you'd like to hear about that old

coastguardsman, I'll tell you *his* history," said Jim, impressively.

"No, thank you; I don't care about hearing any further particulars about that ancient mariner. I was only curious about the lady, because you made such an unnecessary mystery of her," rejoined Miss Hawksbury, with all her sex's profound indifference to accuracy.

"I don't think I've made any of her," retorted Jim. "I resisted cross-examination when I found myself in the box, that was all."

"You had better confide in me for the future. Your little flirtations always reach my ears sooner or later; usually sooner," observed Miss Hawksbury, dryly.

Jim laughed as he rose and strolled across to his mother. It was vain to argue with his sister on this point he knew. It was her custom to denounce any civility he might offer to a lady as flirtation, in which habit Miss Hawksbury was by no means singular among women.

"And so you don't like Muddlebury, Mr. Cherriton?" remarked Miss Auriole.

"No, and it's not quite our fault. Muddlebury, unlike the Grande Duchesse, don't dote upon the military, and thinks the sooner we go where glory waits us the better."

"And that in your case means Aldershot?" said Letty, interrogatively.

"Yes; we go there in the spring, where glory in its pacific form of field-days and wiggings doubtless awaits us."

"Wiggings!" exclaimed Letty.

"I beg pardon, Miss Auriole; it's military slang for irascible fault-finding. Unfavourable, but by no means reticent, criticism of one's efforts to serve one's country."

"Ah, you mean the generals get angry when you make mistakes," cried Letty.

"Rather, and when we don't as well. I regret to say it's not confined to the generals, but spreads like an epidemic through the senior ranks. A field-day, Miss

Auriole, either ends in a hurricane of wrath or universal contentment."

"Like a real battle, in congratulations or bitter anguish."

"Just so," replied Mr. Cherriton, grinning; "only we get over the bitter anguish state rather quicker at Aldershot. After lunch and a cigar we usually feel ourselves again."

"And I suppose," said Miss Auriole, much amused, "that praise and blame are meted out in somewhat zigzag fashion, much after the manner of Old Bailey justice, as described in Hook's 'Gilbert Gurney.' You remember, they acquitted and found the prisoners guilty alternately, without regard to evidence."

"Precisely!" exclaimed the Chirper, gleefully; "all commendation to-day, general diffusion of wiggings to-morrow. It's always a toss-up which."

"Take care," cried Letty, laughing;

"suppose I were to publish these terrible disclosures"

"Impossible!" retorted Mr. Cherriton, with an affectation of great dismay. "My prospects in life, Miss Auriole, are in your hands."

"Well, I must pledge myself to be discreet. It would be too sad to think that a hero's career should be nipped in the bud by the imprudence of a woman's tongue."

"Thanks, Miss Auriole," replied Mr. Cherriton, gaily; "that is step the first, so clever people tell me. Once get the ladies to believe in your future, and the men soon follow suit. Will you promise to use your influence in my behalf the first time you've a chance?"

"It's not very likely, I fear, that opportunity will come to me, but you may count upon me if it should," rejoined Letty, with marked gravity.

"I'll tell you one thing," said the Chirper,

lowering his voice, and glancing round as if in some trepidation lest his words should be overheard; "our heads are gentlemen, you know, and when that's the case they always find it rather hard to say 'No' to a lady. As Alec Donaldson says—you don't know him, I suppose—no, of course you don't," continued Mr. Cherriton, as Letty made a sign of dissent. "He's deep, very deep, is Alec; well, as he says, 'if you want anything out of anybody, always trust to a woman's influence in preference to a man's.' Now, as I said before, Alec is clever, and I believe in Alec."

"You mean the Mr. Donaldson that has been taking care of Jim?" inquired Letty, much amused.

"Just so," returned Mr. Cherriton, nodding his head solemnly. "He can patch up schemes as well as constitutions, can Alec."

"Ah well, Lady Hawksbury is looking for her bedroom candle, so I suppose it is time to retire. But depend upon it, Mr.

Cherriton, when I have divisions and commands to bestow," said Letty, rising, "I shall not forget your claims. Good-night."

"I say, Jim," said the Chirper, as a little later he lay coiled up in his arm-chair behind a big cigar in the smoking-room, "it feels deuced like a frost; and if not positively sinful, I can't help hoping the thermometer will drop pretty near to zero."

"Why so?" inquired Hawksbury, lazily.

"Why, you see, we can't hunt ourselves, you and I—that is, not to do any good, you know, on account of our luck, and it's so provoking to see other fellows going in for it. I'm not malicious, and don't bear my fellow-creatures any ill-will as a rule," continued the Chirper, plaintively, "but I can't help wishing it would freeze some, under the circumstances. It's too aggravating."

"You're a nice amiable young man, upon my word!" said Jim Hawksbury. "You can't hunt, so let there be no more hunting.

What an awful frame of mind to retire to rest in."

"You're right, it is," retorted Mr. Cherriton, grinning. "Pass the whisky ; I'm not fit to go there yet."

CHAPTER V.

THE BIG PIKE.

Verjuice to our feelings is the first tap of old age at our door. When we find we cannot walk as we once did; when hand and eye begin to fail a little; when those rocketers we could once bring down so deftly pass over our heads scathless; when the fences seem bigger than of yore, and our accuracy in making a losing hazard seems to have unaccountably departed—a terrible time that for those keenly addicted to all such pursuits, and who, having been of the first flight, now find themselves compelled to succumb to younger blood. They do not subside into the second place without much

repining and irritable excuse for their shortcomings. Want of health or want of condition they mutter when the stubbles prove so wearisome; their horses are only half broken; the billiard-table is not fit to play upon. It is no use, my friends, you have shot your bolt; have reached the zenith of your life, and are now steadily progressing towards its nadir. After a little we become more reconciled to our lot; are content to enjoy such amusement as we may yet compass without caring that we are beaten at our pet pastime; but it is somewhat bitter, that first discovery that we are not what we once were. Sir Randolph has of ate admitted this sadly to himself, and it has made him wondrous shy of joining in those field sports of which he has been all his life so arduous a supporter.

It was not his age, for he was not very far past fifty, and men constantly show no sign of failing till much later on; but Sir Randolph had lived hard in his younger

days, and drawn freely on his *physique*. Constitutions, like estates, are not inexhaustible, and men run through the former quite as easily as the latter, spending at times, indeed, the two together, and preparing for themselves a premature old age by no means lovely to look upon. At this epoch of their lives men are apt to take up strange fancies; avarice, for instance, often contracted about this period, and great anxiety displayed concerning our hoard in this world just as it behoves us to be thinking of another.

I am not speaking of any particular age in man's life; merely of that time when he first becomes conscious and reluctantly admits that he is growing old. It may come to him at forty, at sixty, at eighty; it is impossible to say. There was a well-known hunting man in the shires but a few years ago who was bad to beat in his eightieth year.

It had certainly taken root of late in Sir

Randolph's mind that it was the duty of his son to repair such holes as he, Sir Randolph, had made in the property; in short, Jim was to tinker the family kettle by a wealthy marriage. Getting exceeding anxious about the integrity of the Ringstone estate is Sir Randolph, just as it is becoming more an affair of his son's than his own. While he could hunt four days a week and shoot two during the winter time, and thoroughly enjoy his London season, the baronet had recked little of his early indiscretions, and troubled his head less about Jim's doings, providing he made no great demand for supplies in excess of his allowance. But when gout and failing health reduced Sir Randolph to pass much time by the fireside, he began, like many men in similar cases, to breed crotchets and hatch whimseys. Impossible, he thought, to leave the world with satisfaction till the estate was quite clear again. Jim must wed someone sufficiently well dowered to do that. Of course he didn't care

whom, but with an heiress like Letty Auriole close at hand, it really seemed superfluous to look farther. He has no intention of speaking to Jim on the subject at present; he will bide his time, and not interfere till he deems it expedient. Meanwhile he sits brooding on what is like to prove an addled egg.

The malignant Chirper is gratified next morning by finding his hopes fulfilled. The ground is white with a hoar-frost, and the evergreens glittering with icy gems. The feathers of the robin stand up, and he has taken upon himself that aspect of rotund dejection he always exhibits in hard weather, presenting nothing but a fluffy and disconsolate little ball to the spectator, from the midst of which peer his keen, greedy little eyes. The blackbirds and thrushes hop despondently across the lawn; small chance of the worm being abroad this morning, rise the blackbird never so early. Our feathered contemporaries always look sad in a hard

frost, as for the matter of that so do our poorer brethren. There is mighty little pleasure in that exhilarating air when it is cutting through insufficient clothing, and small use in an exceeding appetite when there is nothing wherewith to satisfy it. A sharp frost may be a joyous time with the well-to-do, but it is not attended with much mirth as concerns the birds and that portion of humanity who live from hand to mouth —portentous difficulty about obtaining the necessary worm in both cases.

"A clear dispensation of nature this in favour of your infirmities," exclaimed Letty Auriole, as she greeted Mr. Cherriton at the breakfast-table.

"Yes," replied that gentleman, benignly, "it seems as if Jim and I were going to have a turn."

"Of enforced indolence," interrupted Miss Hawksbury, laughing. "Don't flatter yourself, Mr. Cherriton, that we mean to let you off so easy. There are plenty of things

to be done in a frost. We must look up our skates, Letty."

"Capital idea," cried Cherriton. "The next question is, will the ice bear?"

"No," said Jim Hawksbury, as he dived into the recesses of a cold game-pie, "luckily for you it won't. Judging from the last time I saw you on skates, Chirper, I should say you require your hands quite as much as your feet when disporting yourself on the ice."

"One don't make omelettes without breaking eggs, nor cut eights without getting croppers," replied Cherriton, sententiously. "I was ambitious, Miss Auriole."

"An ambition which brought its own discomfiture apparently," laughed Letty.

"Quite so. Perhaps, upon the whole, it is as well the ice don't bear."

"I really don't quite know what we're to do," said Miss Hawksbury, meditatively.

"Do!" cried a jolly voice from the door, which had opened noiselessly during Sara's

last remark, "there's always plenty of fun to be had in a frost. Good morning to you all. How are you, Mr. Cherriton? I trust Ringstone air and Ringstone claret brought you peaceful slumbers. Do! bless my soul, Sara, such a day for pike-fishing. They'll be greedy for food this weather. I've just run up to propose a day on the lake. Trolling for us, and a little trimmering for the ladies when they come up with the lunch. What do you say, Jim?"

"The very thing. I don't think either the Chirper or myself can use a rod, but we can manage the trimmers well enough."

"How nice of you to think of it, Uncle Robert," exclaimed Miss Hawksbury.

"I wonder it didn't occur to you at once, Sara. You and I have pulled out a big fish before now when the ground was like iron, and the water edged with ice. I'll go and look after the tackle, if you'll see to the creature comforts. Don't forget the cherry brandy, it'll be comforting on the lake."

"Particularly so," muttered the Chirper, *sotto voce*. He had no experience or great opinion of fishing in any shape, and bethought him of sundry acquaintances who had often summed up their three weeks' salmon-fishing much in this fashion: "Water thick as pea-soup all the time I was there. I only got three rises and not a fish." "However," reflected Mr. Cherriton, "a good lunch, a well-filled cigar case, and the cherry brandy will carry one through, even should the Rev. Hawksbury turn out to have been unduly sanguine." But the rest of the party knew better, and had often witnessed rare sport upon the lake. Plenty of good fish to be taken there an they would bite, and your pike's appetite is keen in "the hard gray weather," when the black north-easter

Sweeps the golden reed-beds,
  Crisps the lazy dyke,
Hungers into madness
  Every plunging pike.

The rector is off to confer with keepers concerning rods, bait, &c., turning in the doorway to exhort the girls to wrap well up, for it will be cold on the lake.

"As for you fellows," he continued, good-humouredly, "the work should keep you warm enough."

"We mean doing our best, Uncle Robert," laughed Jim; "but we've only a sound arm apiece."

"Ah! I forgot that. Never mind; you've a hand apiece for the oars, and we must trust to the trimmers to keep you employed. Come down when you're ready. You'll find me on the water."

"Is pike-fishing great fun, Miss Auriole?" inquired the Chirper, in a low tone.

"Of course it is when there are plenty of fish on the trimmers and the rods are in luck. Punctilious people call the former poaching work, but we don't mind that at Ringstone."

Two o'clock saw a neat pony-carriage pull

up at a summer-house on the lake-bank, from which the attendant groom speedily unearthed and then proceeded to unpack a most comfortable-looking hamper. Jim and Cherriton, who had passed their morning putting down trimmers, were smoking gravely at the rendezvous, and had been awaiting its arrival with much interest.

"Most gratifying, such attention," cried Miss Auriole, gaily, as she sprang lightly from the carriage.

"A most unbecoming hankering after the flesh-pots," remarked Miss Hawksbury, laughing. "Don't deceive yourself, my dear; it is gluttony, not gallantry. You know it is, Jim!"

"No; hunger, exhaustion, and general usedupedness," interposed Mr. Cherriton. "We require sustenance badly."

"And what sport have you had?" inquired Letty.

"Well, you'd better ask Jim," replied Mr. Cherriton, with gravity; "I don't

understand this, you see. I thought the point was to take fish out of the water, and we've spent the whole morning putting them in. Must have a good afternoon though, Miss Hawksbury, if we only pull up what we've put down. There's over a dozen trimmers, all with something on. That we can swear to, as we put it on."

"This affectation of ignorance does not impose upon us," returned Sara. "But how did you two cripples get on in the boat?"

"Beautifully, after we got regulated," replied Jim.

"How regulated? What do you mean?"

"Why, you see at first my right hand was so much too strong for the Chirper's left that we only turned round and round, but after we had settled he was to pull two strokes to my one we got on pretty well. Neither very quickly nor straightly may be, but that didn't matter."

"And where is Uncle Robert? What has he done?"

"Nothing much as yet—three small fish. We left him at the Rock pool, where, he told us in confidence, dwelt a monster. A monster, I fancy, still uncatched, and determined to dwell on there rent free," remarked Mr. Cherriton, cynically.

"Uncle Robert will account for him in due time, never fear," retorted Miss Hawksbury. "He has rather more perseverance than some fishermen I wot of."

"Oh, come, now," returned the Chirper; "everyone knows patience and not perseverance is the real thing in this sort of sport. Bait a hook and watch a float. We're watching, oh so anxiously. Trouble you for the sherry, Jim."

"Uncle Robert is spinning," exclaimed Letty, laughing. "You understand that, Mr. Cherriton?"

"Not without a wheel and a lady to

superintend it," replied the Chirper, mendaciously.

"You little humbug," cried Jim. "Don't be imposed upon, Letty, by this affectation."

"Jim, my dear," said Miss Hawksbury, with great gravity, "I am afraid your friend is really ignorant of the science of the angle. Does he know more about hunting, or is his wrist also an affectation?"

This attack was more than Mr. Cherriton could bear, and he was about to reply at length when the arrival of the rector cut short the badinage.

"Can't persuade him to look at my bait this morning, Sara, and there's a twenty-pounder in the Rock pool if ever I saw one. I have risen him four times and struck the first, but he broke away almost immediately. I mean to have him though. Give me something to eat, quick, it's time we were round the trimmers."

A keen sportsman and man of decision, Uncle Robert. No dalliance with the flesh-

pots permitted after his arrival. A sharp hasty meal, a *chasse* of the famed cherry brandy, and then all hands on board to pick up the trimmers; such were Uncle Robert's peremptory orders.

Mr. Cherriton walked down to the boat in somewhat listless manner—it is not that there is any want of enthusiasm about the Chirper—no laggard he in any sport or game he understands, but fishing is to him a mystery. He is sceptical of accounts of struggles with mighty salmon till past midnight on the Scotch rivers; but pike-fishing—well, he never, to use his own expression, "met anybody who'd got down to that." He supposed it a good excuse for a lunch out of doors, only what a pity not to make more of so excellent a lunch, though, perhaps, making less of it more correctly expressed Mr. Cherriton's views.

"Now, Jim," cried Miss Hawksbury, when they were fairly afloat, "you steer, and Letty and I will row. It will warm

us, and we can pull enough for this sort of work. Mr. Cherriton, if you will go forward you can help Uncle Robert with the trimmers, and learn a little about pike-fishing generally."

"You must push along, girls," cried the rector, cheerily. "The light won't hold above another hour or so."

Those small discs of painted cork, which represent the trimmer, are not easy to find on an expanse of open water. Drifting, as of course they do, with the wind, or it may be with the liveliness of the bait attached to the line (for quite as often as not it is a living fish and not a dead that is offered as a *bonne bouche* to the bigger denizens of the pond, lake, or stream), they naturally stray widely from where they were cast in; a sharp look-out is consequently necessary when the picking up of them takes place. They progress so far with no great success—a couple of fair perch, a small jack, and three eels,

which occasion much trouble by their sinuous and slimy writhings, are the sum total of the take. Only two more to pick up, and these, as yet, not to be discovered.

Uncle Robert looks puzzled.

"Didn't you say you put one down south of the island, Jim?"

"Just so; can't you see it?"

"No. Row slow, girls, and give us time to use our eyes in front," returns the rector.

"Think I'll have a weed," mutters Mr. Cherriton, more convinced than ever of what a fallacy pike-fishing in every shape is, as a sport.

"Let us try up towards the Rock pool, Uncle Robert," cried Jim. "It was a very lively bait, and quite likely to invade the sanctuary of your twenty-pounder."

"Nonsense, it's right up wind;" but a few more seconds and the rector exclaims gleefully: "You're right, Jim, there it is, and with a fish of some kind on it, too. Easy, Sara;" and the Rev. Robert leans

forward to seize the trimmer. Hardly had he raised the cork from the water, than it is twitched from between his fingers, and goes skimming up the lake at a great pace.

"He's off again!" shouts the rector. "Now, girls, let's see you row. There's a big one on this time, by the way he carries the trimmer away with him. Put her head for the island, Jim; he's travelling that way, and nearly as fast as we are."

Letty and Sara bent to their oars till their faces flushed, when once more came the welcome cry of "Easy!" from the rector. Still, no sooner had he grasped the cork disc of the trimmer, and by so doing placed a slight strain upon the fish, than it was wrenched from his hand with a jerk that tumbled him on to the gunwale of the boat, and toppled his low-crowned hat into the water. The girls laughed immoderately, in which laughter the rector good-humouredly joined. Mr. Cherriton, becoming imbued

with the fierce ardour of the chase, votes pike-fishing somewhat exciting.

Uncle Robert's hat having been picked up, away they went again in pursuit of the little red disc, which, having soon slackened its speed, was once more well-nigh motionless on the water. Stealthily they creep up to it this time, everyone all agog for the next essay. Uncle Robert, without his hat, leans anxiously forward in the bow, with Mr. Cherriton by his side. Once more he grasps the cork, and the Chirper, seizing the line just below with his sound hand, the two both got a firm grip of the trimmer.

"Pull, girls," cries Uncle Robert, "or else he will break away. Steer straight up the lake, Jim. We shan't land this fellow for half-an-hour. It's my big fish, I'll bet a hundred——"

Uncle Robert kept as severe a strain upon the fish as he dared; but, though they were following him, so furious were his plunges,

that after a few minutes the rector called to Mr. Cherriton to let go his hold. "He's pretty firmly hooked, but I am afraid of his breaking us," he exclaimed, as the trimmer once more went dancing across the water. Again and again was the trimmer lifted, and after a brief tussle once more abandoned under the sage command of Uncle Robert; but the last time the resistance waxed fainter, and it was evident they were tiring the fish out. Still the light was waning rapidly, and unless they kept very close to the trimmer there was now great danger of losing sight of it. The girls are tired out, and Jim and Cherriton have taken their places at the oars. Miss Auriole is steering, and Sara sits beside her uncle in the bow. Once more the rector catches hold of the line, and for the first time ventures to begin to haul in a little. It comes in slowly but surely, and after a few minutes a huge pike is just seen at the surface of the water; then, with an angry plunge, he once more wrenches

the line from the rector's hand, and dashes off across the lake.

"Pull hard the starboard oar!" screams Uncle Robert, frantically. "Put her head once more for the island, Letty; the villain is nearly done."

The next time the rector seizes the line it is evident the fight is nearly over. It hauls in with sullen resistance, it is true, but there is no longer the fierce plunges of previous times. At last the big fish appears upon the surface, still struggling, but in inert, languid fashion compared to his former fiery wrestling with his enemies.

"Stand back, Sara, he's beyond your strength. Quick, Jim you, with the landing-net."

Jim Hawksbury dropped his oar into the water, sprang forward and seized the net. Slowly the rector hauls in the dying monarch of the lake, giving yet convulsive but impotent jerks against the cruel hook

imbedded in his entrails. He is too big for a landing-net, and they have no gaff.

"Steady, Jim," cries the rector; "throw the net away, and when I bring him close up to the boat, slip your fingers into his gills. Lie down, man, across the gunwale. That's it. And as soon as you have got your grip call out to me. We'll have him between us."

Frantic with excitement, Mr. Cherriton also dropped his oar. There was something in pike-fishing after all. Slowly, and fighting for his ebbing life inch by inch, the big pike is drawn under the prow. A fierce snap of his jaws greets Jim's bare outstretched arm; but Jim is no stranger to the sport, and not likely to give his victim a chance to lacerate his hand. Another minute, and his fingers are within its gills.

"Now, Uncle Robert, haul in all you can, or I'm in the lake."

A great splashing, and then Jim, the pike, and the rector are in a somewhat

confused heap in the boat's bows. One or two sharp taps on the head with a stretcher, and the fish that has fought them so long and so gallantly lies dead, and they crowd round to look at their spoil.

"Five-and-twenty pound if he's an ounce," cries the rector; "and what a game fish. Ah, if I had but had him on the rod!"

"You'd have probably lost him," said Letty, roguishly. "He very nearly pulled you into the water once or twice as it was, you know."

"He'd have taken a deal of killing,' observed Jim; "but it is time to be off home, it's getting quite dusk."

And now arose a somewhat farcical episode in that day's fishing. In the excitement of the taking of the great pike both Jim and Cherriton had dropped their oars, and those oars had silently and unobserved slipped into the water. They were doubtless not far off; but it was now so dark that it was impossible to see them, and

it did not seem quite so clear how they were to get their boat to the shore under these circumstances. No great distance, certainly —not more than three hundred yards or so; but how to obtain the necessary propelling power, that was the question. The whole party broke into a peal of laughter, when they comprehended that they were virtually water-logged.

"In all cases of shipwreck," said the rector, with a twinkle of his eye, "the proper thing is to serve out a ration of rum to begin with. Sara, my dear, where's the cherry brandy? Let us make a libation in honour of our victory."

"Well," said Jim Hawksbury, after much jesting on their pitiable condition, "this is all very well; but neither jokes nor cherry brandy will take us ashore, and to wait till we drift there is somewhat too indefinite. What are we to do?"

"Do!" replied Uncle Robert, "why,

taking what advantage we can of the drift, we must sacrifice our hats, gentlemen, and paddle with them."

The absurdity of the proposition redoubled the laughter of the, so to speak, water-logged party; but the rector, with a quiet "Now, Jim, you take the other side," proceeded calmly to put his proposal into practice; and, after some ten minutes, they succeeded in reaching the bank, though in a not particularly convenient place for landing. Then, tired and somewhat wet, with Jim and the rector bearing the big pike between them on a cross-stick, the merry party made their way back to the house.

"Don't you think pike-fishing rather fun?" said Miss Auriole to Mr. Cherriton, as she took her candle from his hand in the hall.

"Capital. I never had a pleasanter day, or laughed more," replied the Chirper. "I

only hope you didn't get very wet getting ashore."

"Nothing to signify," returned Letty. "And to see you all paddling with your hats was worth a regular ducking."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOWAGER.

A good four months have elapsed since that day famous in Uncle Robert's diary as the date of the capture of the twenty-five pound pike in Ringstone Lake, or, to speak more correctly, and the rector was wont to be very accurate in that most sporting day-book, that fish of twenty-three-and-a-half pounds. Miss Auriole is in town, staying at what she really looked upon as her home, much time as she was wont to pass at Ringstone Abbey. Miss Auriole lives with old Lady Hawksbury, Sir Randolph's mother, a most astute, vivacious old lady, who can be made to believe in her seventy-four years

by no manner of means. Not that the dowager affects juvenility in dress, or presents herself before the world a being composed by her lady's-maid—a wondrous and ghastly effect of rouge, false tresses, and general decrepitude. Very much the reverse of all this is Lady Hawksbury senior. A nice gray-haired old woman, with a delicate bloom of Nature's own giving even yet on her faded cheek, with an eye keen as a gled's, and a tongue, to say the least of it, both quick and sharp, a step so light and firm as to utterly belie her years. In fact, few people would have given the dowager credit for being within fifteen years of her actual age.

She is a pretty picture as she sits there this spring morning clad in the dainty gray silks she especially affects, with a marvellously neatly-turned foot peeping out from beneath her petticoats. She has kept the neat *petite* figure even yet that made her famous in her day, and the old lady is

proud still of her personal advantages, but she is far too shrewd not to know that if she would look her best it must be as winter nowadays, and that the woman who struggles artificially to preserve the autumn of her life reminds one painfully of stucco. A grand sight is the ruin gray, but the ruin that would hide the ravages of time by stucco, ah! that is a sorrowful sight to see.

Letty Auriole saw the country-side season, as it may be denominated, pretty well out before she left the Abbey. The hounds were meeting at early hours, and the violets and primroses in full blow, ere she bade Ringstone farewell.

It was the usual arrangement between her and old Lady Hawksbury. Miss Auriole went to the Abbey for the autumn and winter months, while the dowager paid a round of visits. She was amazingly popular, that old lady, with her shrewd, caustic tongue, warm heart, and exuberant vitality. Old, pooh! nobody ever recollected Lady

Hawksbury's age; how should they when she so utterly ignored it herself. Even when she spoke of "elderly people like me, my dear," it seemed only an excellent joke. True, her hair was gray, but it was still thick and soft, and with the keen dark eyes looking out from beneath the yet dark, straight brows, it seemed only a freak such as Nature will sometimes play with our locks. I fancy that many of those who laughed with Lady Hawksbury in those pleasant country houses never in the faintest manner realised that in reality she was an old woman.

But Ringstone Abbey the dowager never could be induced to set foot in. Though very fond of her grandchildren, she had no great affection for Sir Randolph. She had said many years before that it was a thousand pities Robert had not been the elder, and, as is sometimes the case, she had bestowed the first place in her heart on her youngest boy. Once again had Jacob stolen

Esau's birthright. And what wonder! She, with her quick intelligence, recognised the vain, petulant disposition of her eldest born quite as speedily as she did the bluff, sterling honesty of his brother. But the one thing that had made the dowager so carefully avoid the Abbey was her daughter-in-law. For the present Lady Hawksbury the dowager entertained the most contemptuous dislike. She had done her best to break off the match at the time, and the younger Lady Hawksbury was quite aware of the fact. It would have been very singular had there been much love between the two ladies under such circumstances. The dowager could more than hold her own, but she was not going to concede her daughter-in-law the advantage of being her hostess.

Letty had arrived in Park Lane only some two or three days before, and the dowager had not yet had fairly out that family talk which always took place when

she and Letty foregathered again after their separation.

"And so you found my step-daughter civil, eh? Caroline has some difficulty about that even when her intentions are of the best."

"I'm sure Lady Caroline is always kindness itself to me," interposed Letty.

"I daresay, child; but Caroline, when she is pressing you to stay, always appears so very much as if she means you to go. I sometimes try to hope that she has her intervals of sincerity, but I regret to say I don't think I ever witnessed one."

"You don't like her, and see very little of her," retorted Miss Auriole.

"Quite true as to the first, and a thing to be devoutly thankful for as regards the second. Just as well, too, Letty, or I should probably be much more sincere than she'd consider good taste; not but what I think she knows my opinion of her pretty well. We often arrive at that without any

explanation. Haven't you sometimes known a person dislikes you, though you have never actually spoken to each other?"

"I don't recollect such a case," replied Letty, meditatively.

"Ah, you will before you come to spectacles, unless you are a woman of no observation. I have known many, and I only hope they were equally aware I didn't like them," said the old lady, sharply.

"Grandmamma, don't be vicious," said Letty, laughing.

Although not her relations, she was accustomed to call all the elders of the Hawksbury family by such names, as if she had been veritably sister to Sara and Jim. She had been so completely brought up amongst them that they represented, in fact, all the kinship she had ever known, with the exception of her maternal grandfather, who had left her an heiress. Of her mother, of course, she recollected but little.

"So Jim's come to Aldershot," observed

the dowager. "I am glad of that. I shall see something of him this year, and I like Jim."

"Yes; the regiment arrived this last month. Jim wrote to Sara to apprise her of the fact, and to point out that, if we cared to see a field-day when the summer-time comes, he would feed and take care of us."

"Excellent; we'll go. I always like the glitter and display of a review. My husband was a dragoon, you know, for five or six years after our marriage, and I moved about with the corps all that time. I have plenty of military friends even yet; there is Sir Richard Bowood, who called here only two days ago. I expect him to do something for Jim."

"How so?" inquired Letty.

"He has great interest, and consequently is certain to get a command before long, and then I may, perhaps, persuade him to take Jim on his staff."

Letty smiled. Was Mr. Cherriton right, and feminine influence a mighty assistance to a military man? It would really seem so.

"And Sir Richard Bowood! I suppose he is a very distinguished officer?" inquired Miss Auriole.

"Of course, my dear," replied the old lady, with a wicked twinkle in her sharp black eyes. "All generals are distinguished officers; the newspapers always call them so. I forget where it was that Sir Richard acquired his laurels. I rather think that, like another famous hero, 'he's never fought because he found no enemy to fight withal;' but that does not matter, he is distinguished by anticipation. Only wait till he gets an opportunity; it is expected that when he does he will astonish military circles and the public. In the meanwhile he may perhaps prove useful to Jim."

"To think of your scheming in this way, grandmamma," said Miss Auriole, laughing.

"There's not very much scheming about it, and one is bound to lend a hand to one's own blood where one can. When does Randolph come up?"

"Next week, and I hope it may do him good. He has almost given up his hunting this season; sits moping in the house, and complains that he grows old."

"God bless the boy!" cried the vivacious old lady, "old—he old at fifty! Why, I declare I hadn't altogether given up dancing at that age."

"No, indeed, grandmamma; no need to tell me that," cried Letty, laughing merrily. "Why, didn't you write me word from the Hugessons' this winter, that you had found yourself involved in the Lancers?"

"Hush, child," replied the dowager, with a comical glance. "You must not whisper such a story in town. I can't have my country frolics brought up in array against me in Mayfair. I acted in charades, and committed all sorts of indiscretions there;

but Randolph to talk of growing old yet—why, it's preposterous."

"He has aged, though, the last twelvemonth, a good deal in appearance. You will notice it, I am sure—it's a good while since you have seen him, remember."

"Yes. Ah, well! I suppose a woman like Caroline takes a good many years off a man's life," said the dowager, meditatively.

"For shame, grandmamma. I won't have aunt abused before me."

"Quite right, Letty; but I have got to the time of life when our likes and dislikes are pretty well pronounced. Moreover, I am of that same temperament as Madame Noget, who said that she had never enjoyed such delicious quarrels as with her late husband, and that to a woman of her constitution, a real downright quarrel was a positive luxury. I cherish my dislikes from a similar conviction. But, my dear, we have all our pet prejudices."

That the dowager had, there certainly was

little doubt. She was a woman of strong feelings, and neither loved nor hated by halves. A very outspoken old lady, too—not of that unpleasant kind, be it understood, who, under the flimsy pretext of plain speaking, seize upon every opportunity of being discourteous and disagreeable; but one who made no pretence of being interested in people not to her taste, and candidly owned that she had no wish to meet them again to any mutual friends who might insist upon knowing in what light she regarded them. That she and her step-daughter should be as water unto oil in their mingling was palpable to everyone.

Lady Caroline, with her insincerity and placid feelings, was the incarnation of all the dowager held in greatest scorn. Her love even for Sir Randolph, which was the strongest passion of her nature, was, as her step-mother avowed, only tepid; indeed, the old lady had once gone so far in her wrath as to declare that her step-daughter

could not be even sincere in her hatred, and actually made it a capital charge on the occasion that she only disliked herself in a lukewarm, half-make-believe sort of fashion. But her son, the rector, who was the recipient of this slightly shrill-spoken confidence, burst into such a roar of laughter, that the dowager, whose perceptions of the ludicrous were keen, awoke to the comicality of her accusation, and was fain to join in the Rev. Robert's mirth.

However, although her prejudices might blind her here and there, Lady Hawksbury senior was a monstrous shrewd, sharp-sighted, warm-hearted old lady; very fond of her younger son, the Rev. Robert, her grandchildren, and Letty Auriole.

Very staunch to her friends was the Dowager Lady Hawksbury on such points, manifesting moreover much tact and astuteness in advancing their interests, but with one most excellent trait in her character; she by no means insisted on their arriving

at honours or happiness by the particular path she had staked out for them. She was willing they should select their own road in life, and then the kindly old lady was ever willing to lend a hand when she could. An exceptional case, certainly. Most of our dear friends would fain set us on the road to Elysium, but they stoutly insist upon picking out our route and taking our ticket for us—no probability, they think, of our getting there through our own cloudy imaginings.

"I suppose," said the dowager, after a pause of some duration, "Jim has quite got over that fall."

"I think so. His arm was still a little weak when he left, but that was a mere matter of time."

"Ah, yes; he was down at Ringstone, I remember. The Hawksburys, like valuable china, crack a good deal, but seldom break past patching."

"I think Jim has been scientifically mended," replied Letty, laughing. "He

brought a brother-officer down with him—one after your own heart, grandmamma. Such an audacious boy."

"Ah," laughed the old lady, "I do like those audacious youths, they always amuse me; they are a peculiar production of the age. That wonderful combination of *naïveté*, impudence, and fun is almost peculiar to the present generation; somewhat scarce nowadays, though very quaint; how loathsome is the imitation. The Brummagem edition is the quintessence of vulgarity. That *naïve* impertinence of tongue should be wedded to the most courtly manner and most trained of voices, and there we have the Louis Quatorze age again, suffering under the drawback of our most unromantic costume. Why, in this age of luxury, do our men wear broadcloth instead of velvet and embroidery?"

"Perhaps because the populace might jeer at them if they showed themselves in such attire," replied Letty, laughing.

"Pooh," rejoined the old lady, with a most contemptuous toss of her head. "When the gentry fear the *canaille* it is time for them to resign their place in this country—*noblesse oblige*, my dear, or there exists no necessity for a *noblesse*."

A prouder or more thorough aristocrat than old Lady Hawksbury never lived. She held that had the nobility of France stood by and struck for the Crown in '89, the great revolution might have been averted, and congratulated herself always that the division of the nobility between the two parties saved our own revolution from being "low." That very great difference between the two countries when each had to face that vast problem, the finishing up and burying of the feudal system—to wit, that the barons of England had from the days of John been ever in wholesome opposition to the Crown, while those in France had been ever in league with it—was a thing she could have by no manner

of means been brought to listen to, yet it saved us from similar chaos. The privileges of the Crown were gradually pared down on the one side, while on the other the leaders of the democracy were still from among the lords of the realm.

Nobody knew Lady Hawksbury's weakness on this point better than Letty, as she sometimes said: "Grandmamma would have taken her place in the tumbrels without quailing had she been a Frenchwoman of the time of Marat, Robespierre, and Danton."

CHAPTER VII.

CLARISSE AT HOME.

Aldershot, albeit a somewhat dull and dusty residence, is not disliked on the whole, especially by those who have some tolerable private income with which to carry on the war. I am not alluding to the Kriegspiel, nor to the mimic campaigning on such a pretty scale with which we are fain to content ourselves every autumn. It is not the fault of the War Office; you cannot have an army without paying for it, nor, for the matter of that, a fleet, or other toy of nations and burthen of that oppressed impostor: the virtuous working-man. Whether these things are necessary for

our salvation who shall say, but it is well to understand that it is doubtful whether we possess them or have any chance of possessing them till we once more find ourselves immersed in a big war. Our organisation, like our soldiers, existing principally upon paper, and what our liberal rulers so hilariously put down, it is not given to their successors to build up. But the war of which I speak is that fell struggle to, may I say, "get along," the which is a cruel and constantly-recurring problem to so many genial, pleasant, easy-going people, whom we meet in our way through this world. Men, aye, and women too, with a laugh in their eyes and a jest on their lips, but who would be sore puzzled to say where they were to lay their impecunious fingers on that next hundred pounds necessary to carry on the campaign.

Jim Hawksbury, rejoicing in a fair independent income, and not without ex-

perience of Aldershot, determines speedily upon the plan of his summer—he knows that dust-stricken agglomeration of sheds well. He takes rooms in town, a season-ticket, and resolves to enjoy what he can compass of London life from March to August. When Aldershot compels his presence, as it doubtless will a good deal, he can take it out in tobacco, duty, and rackets. Not quite that devotion to his noble profession you would expect, nor that which military reformers actually conceive to exist in the subaltern of the period this; but Jim Hawksbury is fashioned by no manner of means on that ideal young modern Teuton officer in spectacles, who spends his days in playing Kriegspiel and map-drawing, and his nights in the perusal of deep treatises on military tactics. I don't want to depreciate the Teutons, but in the last big fight they had things made somewhat simple for them. To conduct a revolution and a great war at

the same time is not so easy, and France this time had not the veterans of Louis Quatorze to incorporate in her ranks, nor a general to win a Valmy for her. Now a man stationed at Aldershot can enjoy a good deal of the London season if he has money in his pocket, and Jim Hawksbury found little difficulty in spending about half of each week in town. He had managed to secure a very comfortable second-floor in Cleveland Row; that he preferred this to the brace of cupboards he possessed at Aldershot, and the well-lit, well-served coffee-room of The Vacuna to the low, dingy mess-hut, is not to be wondered at. Babylon is very pleasant to those who are moderately well-endowed, cruel and hard though she be to those who are not so. A certain number of visits made of that sort yclept unavoidable, and it occurred to Hawksbury that he would be wanting in courtesy if he did not call on the Lydons; hideous rite this that society

exacts from those that bow down and worship at its tinselled altars, when to call means not to see the people you like, who probably would never quarrel with you on so small an omission, but the toiling over miles of flagstones to leave cards. Jim was not much better than his fellows on this point, and I don't suppose it would have occurred to him to carry on a watering-place acquaintance, such as this had been, unless he felt rather more interested than usual in Clarisse Lydon. Not much given to succumb to wiles of women either, is Hawksbury, but he has certainly thought more about this girl than he can remember to have thought of lady fair since he was so terribly smitten with his sister's governess, when about fourteen years of age—a passion to which her liberality with fruit tarts at luncheon, and jam at evening tea, Sara always stoutly maintained most materially contributed.

However, a bright April morning finds

Jim striding gaily along the Fulham Road, bent upon the discovery of Grove Terrace, at No. 10 of which Clarisse had informed him she and her father resided. Neat, comfortable, one-storeyed houses these, each owning a wonderfully good basement flat—not mere servants' offices, such as you usually find them, but containing a good room or so besides, having moreover a little patch of garden ground in front, and another of considerably more pretensions in rear. Grove Terrace, too, evidently took pride in the cultivation of these little plots. Here and there lived a Micawberish sort of family, who had abandoned their domain to cats and broken bottles, yet in the main the little patches of ground were filled with neatly-trimmed shrubs, while the more extensive ground behind was mapped out into gaily blooming parterres, surrounded with soft, well-shaven turf.

A respectable-looking maid-servant informs him that Miss Lydon is at home in

answer to his inquiry, and, ushering him into a bright, prettily-furnished little drawing-room, begs him to wait while she announces his presence to her mistress.

"This is good of you, Mr. Hawksbury!" exclaimed Clarisse, as, after a lapse of two or three minutes, she entered the room. "Papa will be as pleased to see you as myself. I don't think we need make a stranger of you, so, if you please, I will conduct you to the workshop at once."

"I shall be only too glad," replied Jim, as he followed the girl upstairs.

"It would be rather too arrogant to call it a studio, although that is practically what we make of it—painting-room might meet the case; but, upon the whole, we generally call it the workshop. Here we are, come in;" and so saying, Clarisse threw open the door of the room immediately above that into which Hawksbury had been first shown.

At an easel placed near the window stood Lydon, leisurely pursuing his calling. He

turned as the door opened, and came forward, brush in hand, to welcome his guest.

"Very glad to find you haven't forgotten us, Hawksbury," he exclaimed, as he shook the young man heartily by the hand; "we began almost to fear you had."

"Why, you see, I haven't been in town before this month since I left Burnside," replied Jim. "I was on leave amongst my own people till just before the regiment came to Aldershot. However, I am living no great distance from you now, as when at the camp we are usually a good deal up in London. I hope Burnside set you up completely."

"Hum, only so-so. The fact is, an English spring, with its terrible east winds, is to the full as trying as the Canadian winter I fled from. I've not much to boast about of late."

"No, papa's cough has been very troublesome, and then it is wearisome for him, being so much confined to the house,"

remarked Clarisse. "The doctors say he mustn't go out when the wind's in the east; and, Mr. Hawksbury, it never seems to be anywhere else in this country."

"It is rather troublesome and badly behaved on that point, I must admit," said Hawksbury, for the first time observing how worn and ill Lydon looked; "but we must hope we are pretty well at the end of it now. This has been a lovely week; surely you got out?"

"Yes, and it does me a deal of good; only of course one can't expect to pick up all at once."

"Oh, you're ever so much better, papa, and if the fine weather will only last, and enable you to get about and see people, you will soon be yourself again. It is so dull for him," continued the girl, appealing in some measure to Hawksbury, "to be shut up here. In Canada, you see, there were people to drop in and talk to him, but we have no friends in England."

"You, too, must have found it somewhat wearisome," said Jim, as he thought how monotonous the girl's life must have been during the four or five months that had elapsed since he met her at Burnside.

"Ah," she said merrily, "it seems very *triste* to me, this country of yours, with its fogs, rain, and want of sunshine. We have our dogs'-weather, it is true, at times, in Canada, but we have plenty of bright, clear days in our winter. Above all, we never seem to have lost the sun for good, as you do here."

"And what did you do with yourself?" inquired Jim.

"I had my piano, and my books, and my painting—for I'm a pupil of papa's, you must know; then, you see, nothing ever hurts me, so I could always get out for a run, and the shops alone were something to look at in this big place; and occasionally I went, just now and then, you know, to one or other of the *matinée* enter-

tainments that are always going on—concerts, theatrical performances, &c."

"What, by yourself?"

"Of course, monsieur. It is not nice, I know, for a girl, but who had I to go with; and I am bound to say nobody has ever interfered with me."

Jim could not help thinking that Clarisse was rather too pretty a girl to run about London by herself in this fashion, and glanced at her father to see what he might think on the subject; but Lydon had resumed his painting, and apparently took no heed of their conversation.

She read what was passing through his mind in his face, and added: "I see that you think I ought not to go about alone, but recollect I am compelled to be independent, and act a good deal for myself."

"I didn't mean that, of course," said Jim, somewhat taken aback at finding his thoughts so easily guessed at by his companion. "I was only thinking it must be

rather unpleasant for you, having to knock about so much by yourself. Still, as you say, who is there to go with you. But I am forgetting part of my errand here; besides once more renewing our acquaintance, Lydon, I hope to induce you to dine with me on Friday at The Vacuna."

"Yes, do, papa," exclaimed Clarisse, eagerly; "it will be such a nice change for you, and as the weather is now you could take no harm from the night air."

"Of course you couldn't," urged Jim. "I'll guarantee to send you home hermetically sealed in a four-wheeler should the weather play tricks."

"You're very good, but I never go out," replied Lydon, with a faint smile.

"All the more reason you should begin," cried Hawksbury; "the fly-in-amber life is fatal mentally and bodily. Just a slight fillip will do you no end of good. No party, mind; just a third to break our *tête-à-tête* if I can catch him."

"Go, papa; Mr. Hawksbury's right; it will be good for you," interposed Clarisse.

"Well, I will. You are to make no objection to my running away somewhat early. It is a good many years since I last dined at The Vacuna," added Lydon, in somewhat absent fashion.

Jim said nothing to this. As before remarked, he was quite aware that this London life had been very familiar to Lydon at some period of his career. It seemed strange that it should have been so, but Hawksbury was no whit astonished at hearing that the Canadian artist was familiar with the precincts of The Vacuna. Fast and fashionable London had dined, gambled, and had been ruined there for at least thirty years now, so it might well be that Lydon, who had apparently once been of that world, was familiar with that pleasant but somewhat maligned caravanserai.

"That's all right, then," cried Jim, rising, "and now I shall wish you good-bye till

Friday at 7.30. Miss Lydon, you will give me permission to come again, will you not ?"

"Mr. Hawksbury, you will have our gracious leave so to do," laughed the girl, jumping up, and making him a mock reverence. "You know," she continued, "we shall be always glad to see you. Have we not made you free of our very palladium ? are you not elect of the workshop ?"

"Oh, yes, thanks. No wonder I was slow to believe in that privilege ; to admit such an idler as myself augurs ill for your industry," retorted Jim, laughing, "but have no hope I shall not make you abide by all the consequences of your rashness. For the present, good-bye."

As he walked back to London proper, though where that begins or ends is somewhat difficult to determine in these days, Jim certainly did not think Miss Lydon one whit less attractive than he had in those Burnside days of last November. The

father, too, interested him strangely with his somewhat moody, absent manner, courteous though, and with the air of a man who had lived amongst the best society in his day, when he chose to exert himself; how came he by all this fund of anecdote and bygone gossip; much of it as yet still oral tradition, and not gone to the composition of biography.

Then Jim became somewhat lost in speculation as to whom he should ask to meet Lydon. He thought of and rejected a good many of his acquaintance as he strode up the Fulham Road, finally igniting a huge cabana to assist his cogitations. He felt intuitively that, though by some accident he scarce fathomed, he himself got on well with Lydon, that he was not one of those men who would amalgamate with everyone. He had never seen it, but yet he knew instinctively there was a bitter side to Lydon's nature likely to display itself should he find himself in uncongenial company. He rather

repented he had said anything about a third; perhaps, after all, it would be as well to make it a *tête-à-tête.* It is thus our good angel often whispers in our ears, and, like Jim Hawksbury, we are often deaf to the warning. Still, if we always yielded to presentiments, there are nervous people who would never do anything, and it is difficult to distinguish between our good angel and a disarrangement of the ganglionic centre.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A POOL AT ÉCARTÉ."

The Vacuna was a club of no little notoriety in the London world. Its members were of all sorts of professions and pursuits, with *penchants* for play, meals at abnormal hours, and humour of a practical description. It had no particular hours for closing or opening, but seemed to meet the requirements of the members on that point. Perhaps, like the club, they also kept no particular hours. Its doings either scandalised or amused the neighbouring monachal institutions. For instance, when the story went round that some of its more hilarious constituents, after finishing a very late pool

one night in February, impelled by a laudable love of order, had tidied-up the billiard-room by putting the cues into the fire, the balls through the windows, and the marker into the refrigerator, there was much grinning and wagging of heads midst the adjoining communities, mutterings of "comic—disgraceful—abominable"—according to the light the individual happened to see it in. People's conception of jokes are so varied, that the different view at times taken of the jocular facet involves much awkward complication.

They gave you an excellent dinner at The Vacuna, and there was a most luxurious smoking-room on the ground-floor, in which to enjoy your cigar and coffee afterwards. There were two or three wicked little rooms off it, in which you invariably, between nine and ten, found a select band, who were willing to play cards till daylight—whist, écarté, baccarât, or a

dash of "unlimited"—those reckless spirits were not very particular.

In the breadth of their views, the committee had provided for those members who were better billiard-players than church-goers, trusting, I suppose, to their finding sermons in the balls and good in everything, by permitting them to pursue their favourite diversion on the Sabbath; all of which, combined with sundry little play scandals, caused The Vacuna to stink in the nostrils of all right-minded people, but to be an intensely popular and fashionable club. Fashionable society has of late years shown a strong hankering to patronise anything with a strong *soupçon* of wrongdoing about it.

Lounging in the flower-decorated hall of this Temple of Indolence were Hawksbury and Mr. Cherriton on the Friday evening, duly awaiting the arrival of Alfred Lydon; for, after much consideration, Jim had resolved to ask the Chirper to join them at

dinner, a request to which that young gentleman had been graciously pleased to accede. It really was to some extent a sacrifice on Mr. Cherriton's part. He was at that time of life when we are apt to deem a night in London misspent unless we go to some place of amusement, and it was of course very unlikely that the artist would be that way of thinking. The Chirper, indeed, had felt half inclined to cry off, but Hawksbury had rather pressed the point; and when his special chum did that, Mr. Cherriton had never had the heart to say him nay.

"Rather a bore; he won't do anything or go anywhere, you know," remarked the Chirper, plaintively; "but I suppose, at his time of life, we can't expect him to care about anything but cemeteries. Never mind, Jim, I'll see you through it, but I shall have to be hard on both the claret and tobacco."

"With all my heart," retorted his host, laughing; "but here comes Lydon."

Mr. Cherriton was extremely astonished. We are all wont to build up most fanciful sketches of those about whom we hear; to imagine a man tall or a woman fair, upon no other grounds than our sheer imaginings. The Chirper's conception of the elderly Canadian and somewhat vagrant artist was very far from being that of the high-bred-looking man who, in perfectly correct evening costume, shook hands with Hawksbury, and then quietly consigned his coat and hat to a servant. How little men of different professions at times know of each other. Mr. Cherriton, for instance, had a hazy idea that all artists wore beards, fanciful velvet coats, slouched Rubens hats, and smoked gigantic meerschaums. He was thoroughly taken aback at meeting a painter who might have passed for a colonel of dragoons, barring his short, trim, grizzled beard, but the Chirper was of that age when new experiences come thick upon us.

Having introduced his two guests, Jim led

the way to the dining-room, and the party were soon sitting in judgment on the *chef* of The Vacuna. It was a very pleasant meal that. Lydon was evidently amused by Cherriton's gay, boyish talk, and the latter rattled carelessly on about all that was doing in town, mixing up the coming Derby, the just-decided boat-race, the theatres, Hurlingham, and the gossip of the day in the most incongruous fashion. Again was Jim struck with how well at one time Lydon must have known fashionable London. It was a good many years ago, evidently, from some of his remarks; that the men of his time shot their pigeons at Hornsey Wood instead of Shepherd's Bush and Hurlingham, for instance; but beyond a steady progression westward, fashionable London keeps pretty much to the old round of amusements with which it began the century. Some modification has taken place, of course, in them. Polo and Prince's for example, instead of pugilism and the Five's Court; but the round

of the season continues a good deal the same, only the crowd thickens.

You remember the judge's famous "*Passons au déluge,*" in Racine's comedy, when the advocate, in the case of the stolen capon, commenced his address with an imaginary account of the creation of the world; so, in like manner, we must not linger over the side dishes, but pass quickly to the smoking-room. His coffee and cigar finished, Lydon announces his intention of going home; and as it happens to be a mild night, Hawksbury proposes they shall walk with him a bit of the way.

"Quite a duty," says Jim, "to take advantage of a slight cessation of the east wind, if you are not afraid of the night air."

"Not at all," laughed Lydon, as he lit another cigar. "I am well wrapped up, and the dinner and the talk have done me a deal of good; as Clarisse says, I get moped seeing no one in Grove Terrace."

"Of course you must. However, I mean to intrude upon you pretty often in future."

"By Jove, there's a splash of rain," exclaimed Cherriton; "I believe it means to come down in earnest directly."

"Yes. We had better push along. I shall be able to get a cab at the corner," replied Lydon.

They were in Pall Mall, and by the time they reached the bottom of St. James's Street it was raining heavily. Usually one might fairly reckon upon finding a cab there, but upon that occasion not one was to be seen.

"Come across to my rooms," exclaimed Jim, "they are close by, and I don't suppose this will last long."

It certainly did seem the best thing they could do under the circumstances. A man in Lydon's delicate health could not afford to risk fresh cold by getting wet. Hawksbury's lodgings, it may be remembered,

were in Cleveland Row, close to them, and there the trio sought shelter accordingly.

They were rather nice rooms that Hawksbury had got hold of, very superiorly furnished to the usual run of lodging-houses, which was easily explained by the fact that the furniture was the property of the tenant of the rooms—a regular London man, who, going abroad for some months, thought he might as well let his domicile for the season. Jim proceeded to stir up the fire, light the lamp, and settle his guests in the cosiest chairs he possessed, after the approved fashion in such cases, but it was no use attempting to settle the Chirper. That young gentleman was suffering from repressed vivacity. Walking would have afforded some relief to his restlessness, but to sit down placidly and smoke was beyond him. He felt irresistibly impelled, to use his own phrase, to do something. He was good to play billiards or whist, or go to any place of amusement,

but Mr. Cherriton conceived his evening lamentably misspent if he did not partake of some one or other of these diversions. Mr. Cherriton's "Few Hours with the Best Authors" had been very few since he commenced his military career. His superabundance of vitality prevented the display of much taste for reading on his part. To the riotous animal temperament, common to most of us in the springtime of life, quiet and steadiness are peculiarly unpalatable.

Cherriton fidgeted about the apartment, cigar in mouth, making comments on the upholstery. "Frith's 'Derby Day,' Jim, eh?" he observed, pausing opposite a print; "wonderful like the hill yet, isn't it, barring the bonnets? Suppose they wore 'em like that in those days. Ah, here we have Gladiateur, last year's hero, Mr. Lydon. You should have seen what an exhibition he made of his field at Epsom; at least, it looked so from where I was. How

I threw my hat in the air when the number went up. Aristophanes and Æschylus in terra-cotta! Why does the proprietor keep those bugbears of his youth still before him? Perhaps he plays knock-em-downs with them when he's out of sorts; they did it intellectually with him, no doubt, in days lang syne. Still raining like the devil," continued the Chirper, peeping disconsolately through the window-curtains.

"Come and sit down, you restless young reprobate," cried Jim.

"Reprobate yourself, sir," retorted Mr. Cherriton, loftily, "which, as Mrs. Brown would say, is polite, for, you be dashed, your very chambers savour of the turf and the classical drama, a mixing of the ancient and modern, which, in short, no fellow can understand. Ha, a backgammon board! I'm immense at backgammon. I tell you what it is, I'll play either you or Mr. Lydon the best of three games for half-a-sovereign. Now, what do you say?"

"Nonsense," retorted Jim.

"Just till the rain stops," interposed Mr. Cherriton, insinuatingly.

It was a wicked little creature, and though not a gambler had an unrighteous hankering "after a little bit of speculation" at times. At least, that was what the Chirper denominated his petty play, though, sad to say, it was by no means so circumscribed always as his present suggestion might lead one to suppose.

"Pray don't decline on my account, Hawksbury. It will amuse me to look on, yet it is years since I saw the game," said Lydon.

"Come on, then," cried Jim, "and by the time we've done I daresay it will be fine. Bring the board over here."

Mr. Cherriton brought the board across, and placing it on the table next Hawksbury, proceeded to open it.

"Hallo," he exclaimed, "here's a sell. There are neither men, dice, nor boxes;

nothing but a couple of packs of cards inside. Where are the men, Jim?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," returned Hawksbury, lazily; "look about, you've a talent for discovery, and are full of energy."

"Pooh! I'm not going hunting about for things that just as likely don't exist. The proprietor, you see, no doubt is a regular man in his habits. Threw the backgammon-men into the fire because he considered that game too slow. Sent the boxes and dice after them because they suggested hazard, which he thought too fast. Don't you see, he has settled down into a regular whist and écarté player. Have three games of the latter, will you, instead of the backgammon?" concluded Mr. Cherriton, shuffling the cards.

A keen observer would have been struck had he been attentively watching Lydon's face at this juncture. One would almost have said a slight spasm crossed it, and that he seemed to view the cards uneasily.

"Perhaps you will join us in this," said Jim. "Ecarté is surely a well-known game in the Canadas. We might have a pool."

"I never touch a card," replied Lydon, so brusquely that his companions both turned to look at him. His cheek flushed slightly as he became aware of the attention his manner had excited, and in somewhat sharp, defiant tones, he added: "I presume there is nothing so very extraordinary in a man having no taste for cards."

"Certainly not, but Cherriton and I will not play if it is going to bore you," replied Hawksbury, courteously.

"No, no, pray go on; I used to play once. I have given it up, you understand," muttered Lydon.

Jim said no more. He could not understand how the proposal that he should join a mild pool of écarté could affect a man, and yet, if it had not been that the idea was so utterly preposterous, he would have said Lydon was strongly affected by it. He

quietly mixed himself a brandy-and-soda, and then cut with Cherriton for the deal.

For a man who had given up play, it was curious the fascination the game seemed to have for Lydon. As it continued there was a slight flush visible on his pale cheeks, and what a *beau joueur* would have recognised as the light of battle gathered in his eyes. The combatants were game and game, and as they cut for deal for the conqueror the Chirper observed curtly:

"Go you an extra sov. on this, Jim."

"All right," replied Hawksbury.

"I shall be happy to bet you the same," interposed Lydon.

Mr. Cherriton looked up with some little astonishment, but speedily recovering his manners, answered: "Certainly, if you like."

It so happened that the game proved a very close one. The antagonists were four all, and the final point somewhat sharply disputed. Lydon was looking over Hawks-

bury's hand, and, therefore, it was impossible for Jim to see his face, but the Chirper was of course exactly opposite him, and in the two or three glances he had of it Cherriton was astonished to see the absorbed expression it wore. It was evident his whole soul was in the game. It was not the look of a man greedy of gold, but the wrapped gaze with which we see men contemplate anything that has strange fascination for them.

Hawksbury won, and with the remark, "I wonder what the weather is doing," rose, and walked towards the window.

Drawing the curtains on one side, he looked out at the night for a minute or two, then letting them fall, said: "It still rains hard. You must stick to your refuge a little longer, Mr. Lydon."

The artist was standing by the table, shuffling the cards in an absent manner. "Ah, yes," he said, "I daresay it will soon be over. I don't think, Mr. Cherriton, you

should have proposed on that last hand; we were very weak."

"So was I," replied the Chirper, "or else, of course, I shouldn't have done so. You got rather the best of the take in."

"Perhaps so; I should have played your first hand. In the meanwhile, Hawksbury, as it still rains, we may as well have a pool, eh?" said Lydon, still toying with the cards, and speaking in a slow, hesitating fashion, very unlike his usual custom. It looked as if he had been made to play against his better judgment.

The young men could not help exchanging a glance of surprise at this remarkable inversion of ideas on the part of their companion, but Jim hastened to reply without comment.

"Certainly, we can't do better, if it won't bore you. Suppose you and Cherriton commence."

"All right," replied the Chirper. "What

shall we play? A sovereign every time we come in?"

Lydon nodded assent, and immediately threw the coin on the table, an example his adversary followed, and the game began.

There is no need for us to follow the fluctuations of the cards, but it was curious to notice how completely absorbed the artist became in the play. He took no heed of time, of the increasing little pile of gold by his elbow, he asked no further questions as to the weather. He seemed to have been fascinated by these bits of pasteboard in the way a bird is fascinated by the serpent, when the fierce agony of fear and desire to fly from impending danger is succeeded by a dreamy, helpless lethargy. Lydon was like a man under a narcotic. He showed neither exultation nor despair, as the luck turned either for or against him, yet it was not the trained equanimity of a practised player. He showed such intense interest in the game. An habitual gambler would have

looked, most likely, quite as keenly after his own interests, but would have done so in that nonchalant fashion which is *de rigueur* with all who play high. Careless as he seemed about the stakes, there was none of that feigned indifference about the artist. On the contrary, his companions were struck with its very antithesis, his intensity. It puzzled them. The stakes they were playing for were not high enough to account for being nervous or excited about the result, nor did Lydon seem either. It was simply such a complete absorption in his pursuit, such as Hawksbury could never call to mind having seen before, even amongst the most reckless gamblers.

That he was no tyro was very evident. If Jim was no more than an average performer at écarté, he knew enough to recognise that Lydon was a brilliant player, and felt that if science was to count for anything at cards, it was not much to be wondered at that he and the Chirper were having unmis-

takably the worst of it. Pool succeeded pool, and yet it never seemed to occur to Lydon to think of returning home. He, who had made it such a point that he must be allowed to go away early, paid no attention to the sonorous announcement of midnight by the palace clock just across the street. "The clock strikes one; alas, it strikes not one of us," as De Fonblanque would have put it. But shortly after that hour Mr. Cherriton announced at the conclusion of a pool that he would play no more; that he had promised to look in upon two or three intimates at The Rag anent the twal, and that if he were not prompt in his departure the doors of that hostelry would be closed; the lax discipline of The Vacuna being much reprobated by the more austere conventual establishments in its vicinity.

"Be as well, perhaps, for you, Lydon, too. It's getting late, and you might have some bother about a cab later on," said Jim.

"Good God!" exclaimed the artist,

passing his hand across his face, "twenty past one! I had no idea of the time. I thought—no, bah, I have never once thought about it; but in days long since I was wedded to whist and écarté. It's years since I have touched a card. The old passion seized me to-night, and I have recked little how long we have been playing."

"The rain's all over," exclaimed Cherriton, who had been peering out of the window, "and I think I will be off."

"I trust, Mr. Cherriton, I shall find a speedy opportunity of offering you your revenge," observed Lydon.

"Pray don't mention it. We've not been playing so seriously that you need feel it incumbent," returned the Chirper, gaily—

> "For some must win, and others must lose;
> Only but win it, and who would refuse
> The red gold to bear home in the morning?"

concluded the cornet, with mock solemnity.

"Your winnings, Mr. Lydon, by no means necessitate two cabs. Now I'm off."

"Hold hard a moment; so we all are," retorted Jim. "Couldn't have you singing about the streets in this way, you know, without being there to collect the coppers. Is that poetry all out of your own head, young 'un?"

"Of course it is. It's Tom Brabazon's parody of 'The Fishers.' I learned it, so there can be no doubt about it being out of my own head, can there?"

Overcoats and wraps were rapidly assumed, the lamp turned down, and the party descended into the street. The night was now fair, and Lydon had slight difficulty in obtaining a cab. He bade the young men a kindly good-night, said vaguely that he should always be delighted to see them in Grove Terrace, and then drove off in the same abstracted state that he had fallen into ver since the commencement of the écarté.

"Odd, his turning round in that way,"

remarked Cherriton, as the pair turned up King Street. "For a man who had given up play, I never saw a fellow so keen."

"Curious, very," said Jim. "He seemed to me quite to shiver at the first sight of the cards. Once started, and I never in my life saw such an enthusiast. He's not a gambler; he's more, I should say. He was like no one I ever saw before at play. He reminded me of what one has read about enthusiasts of science, and prosecuted his écarté with the same fiery ardour that men give to the investigation of the most intricate questions."

"He could play, though," remarked Mr. Cherriton, dryly.

"Yes; as far I can judge, I should say he's of the very first calibre. I tell you what he gives me the idea of—a man who has played deep and much in his time, and about whose play there is a history of some sort."

"Of what sort?" inquired the Chirper.

"Confound it, how should I know," replied Jim, as they ascended the steps of The Rag.

CHAPTER IX.

"MY LADY'S DIPLOMACY."

LEFT-HANDED people are by no means uncommon in this world, but left-minded people, we cannot but admit, are still more often met with. I do not mean that people whose views are opposed to our own are left-minded, Heaven forefend. But we are all well acquainted with that servant who persistently places the left boot in place of the right, and *vice versâ*, who cannot help associating your sponge-bag with your tobacco-pouch, and whose general left-mindedness occasions you infinite discomfort. Ignorance! you say—partially. Practice enables people born left-handed to

acquire the use of the right, and, similarly, you may improve left-mindedness; but you can no more eradicate the moral than you can the physical peculiarity. To the end of their days, those with this kink in their disposition usually regard things from an exceptional point of view. For instance, reader, you may regard a thing as black, and I as white, but the left-minded man will declare it to be green—a light in which, as yet, it has occurred to nobody else to look upon it.

The left-minded one arrives at his conclusions and pursues his ends after a fashion all his own. Crooked are the premises which lead to his deductions, indirect always the way by which he seeks to attain his desires. Clever people of this class waste an infinity of time in getting at what they want; they insinuate, for instance, that they like buns, wish somebody would offer them buns, instead of boldly asking for buns or their equivalent.

Lady Hawksbury the younger was, as

may have been already gathered, peculiarly left-minded, and not only peculiarly, but flabbily to boot. She was incessantly scheming about the veriest trifles, manœuvring that people should be on or off her visiting list; for tickets for this, for invitations for that. Trying at times to circumvent her liege lord on the subject of the supplies, for my lady possessed much faculty for the spending of money. She would instinctively attempt this periodically, although she was not only a little afraid of her indolent husband and knew that he read her like a book, but had always found him tolerably lenient when her modiste's bill got more than she could grapple with. It was her ladyship's way, and if she had wanted to borrow a paper-knife, she would have inveighed against the discomfort of uncut periodicals for minutes, with a view to inviting an offer of the loan of that article, sooner than to have requested it direct.

That her son's marriage should be an idea that presented itself to Lady Hawksbury long before the attainment of his majority, was only natural in a woman with such a wonderful bias for social politics. She began to speculate on a wife for him while he was still at Harrow; had really four or five eligible young ladies on hand during his university career, at anyone of whom she thought the heir of Ringstone might throw his handkerchief without detriment; but just as he entered the army, Letty Auriole, through the demise of her grandfather, had inherited the large fortune she now possessed. Lady Hawksbury's mind was made up at once. In homely parlance, it is no use going out to seek what you have on the premises, and my lady decided that Letty was just the wife for her boy. Of late it had occurred to Lady Hawksbury that it was high time to bring about this marriage.

Jim was in his twenty-sixth year, an age

at which it was desirable that he should settle down, determined my lady, and then there was a possibility that the heiress might be wooed and won by somebody else if Jim should delay coming forward much longer. Letty lived a good deal with the dowager, and she, mused my lady, always manifests an utter disregard for the interests of the family; the dowager's opposition to her own marriage of course being a clear case in point. "Quite possible that spiteful old woman would promote Letty's wedding with somebody else if she thought it would annoy me," continued Lady Hawksbury to herself. "She is quite capable of sacrificing us all to her petty jealousy of my unfortunate self." The dowager was neither a spiteful old woman, nor the least jealous of her daughter-in-law. She nourished, indeed, too contemptuous a feeling regarding her ever to have entertained any sentiment of that sort, but the two ladies disliked each other heartily

and when that is the case we are usually prepared to believe the worst of one another.

Despite many experiences to the contrary, Lady Hawksbury never for one instant doubted of her ability to bring such a thing as a marriage about if she took it in hand. She considered herself a consummate tactician—these social manœuvrers always do; no quantity of failure ever the least able to convince them to the contrary. She had merely to decide upon her plan of action, and that once settled, of course the rest would be easy. Any other mother under the circumstances would have probably talked the thing over with her son and then left it, but this would have been infinitely too simple a plan for Lady Hawksbury. She had, as she usually did, taken up a theory of her own concerning Jim's relations with Miss Auriole, which was perfectly unwarranted, and of which Sara could have disabused her in two

minutes—that is, if it had been possible to have convinced Lady Hawksbury her own sagacity could possibly be at fault in a matter of this nature. She held that Jim was careless about pressing his suit, because he felt that he might gather the fruit when he would, the truth being that the idea of marrying Letty had never crossed Jim's mind. Taking her own view, then, of the position, my lady decided that her son must be at once roused from this fancied security. Once awaken some uncertainty about the ultimate possession of the prize, and Lady Hawksbury conceived there would be little fear but what her son would infuse plenty of earnestness into his indolent courtship. Lady Hawksbury would have smiled incredulously even at Jim, had he ventured to deny the existence of such a courtship.

Full of her machinations, which she had now arranged to her entire satisfaction, her ladyship only waited till her son should

happen to drop in to unmask her batteries. Although the hussar had to be down at Aldershot the best part of his time, still he usually called in at Rutland Gate once or twice in the course of the week, and the next time he did so he was ushered into Lady Hawksbury's own private sanctum.

"They tell me you want to see me, mother," said Jim, as he leisurely curled himself up in a pet lounging-chair that he always much affected when summoned to assist at her ladyship's cabinet councils. "Is it so?"

"Not very unnatural if I do, I should imagine," replied Lady Hawksbury, with her artificial laugh.

"No; but generally it is, or you think it is, something serious you have to say when you send for me in this way."

"Nonsense! Mere imagination on your part, that. I felt dull. Our world has been somewhat deficient in gossip of late.

I thought, perhaps, the clubs, and The Vacuna in particular, might have been more fruitful."

"No, indeed; there is not a story to anyone's detriment afloat, unless you call poor Maintower's ill-luck so."

"What is that?"

"Well, it is rather hard lines on the Viscount, you see. He lost a lot of money over the Two Thousand, and this came round to the ears of his intended's father. The old gentleman has turned violent, and swears he will never give his daughter to a gambler. Now, she was a good match for Maintowers, having money and all that, of course, but he was most genuinely attached to her besides, loving her purely for her own sake, as a man should. Rather hard upon him, isn't it; getting not only a facer over 'the Guineas,' but losing a wife to boot?"

"Yes," replied Lady Hawksbury; "but I suppose when men play, they can no more

expect to avoid loss of reputation than money."

"Pooh! don't preach, mother. I'm not standing up for gambling myself; it's not one of my weaknesses, but as long as a man pays when he loses, I don't think his character suffers much in these days."

"But, you see, Lord Maintowers has," replied her ladyship. "So you think a man should love his *fiancée* for her own sake, do you, Jim?"

The hussar nodded.

"What a very uncomfortable and unfashionable doctrine. Yes, decidedly they manage these things better in France," said Lady Hawksbury, with an affected titter.

"It may not be fashionable," retorted Jim, stoutly, "but I don't see it's uncomfortable. I don't go in for the love and the cottage business, and think people who have got nothing are justified in marrying just because they're exceeding spoony on one another. What I mean is this—it is better

a man should care more about a woman for herself than for what she brings him."

"Exactly," said Lady Hawksbury, using her mechanical tone, which conveyed the impression that she had not heard one word that was said, but answered upon finding it was her turn to speak. "What, now, do you think of Letty's engagement?"

"Letty's! You astonish me. This is the first I have heard of it."

"Well, it's not exactly an engagement yet, you know, but it looks very much as if it would shortly become one."

"Who's the man?" said Jim.

"Sir Richard Bowood, Major-General, K.C.B., and all the rest of it. Do you know him?"

"Very slightly; he's not at all a bad fellow. He has the reputation of being a very smart officer, but has been singularly unlucky about seeing service. Rather old for Letty, though, isn't he? Sir Richard must be fifty, if he's a day."

"A mere trifle. Girls don't think much of a quarter of a century or so between them and their husbands in these times. Besides, Letty's getting on, you know; and if young men won't come forward, she must simply select from those that do."

"Letty getting on! Nonsense, mother; why, you know perfectly well she's only one-and-twenty. I am sure, with her fortune, she's no call to be in a hurry."

"Well, I daresay she finds her home none of the pleasantest. I can quite fancy her not liking to live with your grandmother. I'm sure I shouldn't;" and certainly Lady Hawksbury spoke with intention in her voice this time.

"Never mind abusing grandmamma, mother. You don't like her, nor she you; but she's not a bad old lady, though you can't pull with her. But as for Letty making her home there if she didn't like it, you are perfectly well aware that she has a home here, or wherever you and Sara may

be, whenever she chooses to claim it, and knows it as well as you and I do."

"Of course, of course. I didn't quite mean that," returned Lady Hawksbury, quickly, already aware that her intense dislike of her mother-in-law had betrayed her into an indiscreet remark; "but girls, especially when they have money, are apt to long to set up an establishment of their own. Perhaps that is Letty's view."

"She's not actually engaged, then, as yet?"

"No; but it looks as if it would come to that shortly."

"What makes you think so?"

"Good heavens! why, the man's always in Park Lane. What does that mean? What does he go for? It cannot be to see your grandmother. People don't manifest much anxiety for her society, as a rule."

Jim smiled. He knew perfectly well that the dowager was an extremely popular old lady, and that it was quite possible Sir

Richard Bowood might be an old friend. He did not in the least suspect his mother's manœuvre, but he did begin to think she had discovered one more of those mares'-nests which she was somewhat notorious for introducing to the notice of her acquaintance.

"I don't think your evidence quite conclusive," he replied at length. "Men acquire the habit of dropping into particular houses without having any matrimonial intentions. It has never been much in my line, but some fellows never seem settled in a place till they have established themselves on that sort of footing with some family or other."

"I can only say if I was seriously interested in Letty Auriole, I shouldn't like Sir Richard Bowood's constant attendance in Park Lane."

This was a little piece of exaggeration on Lady Hawksbury's part. The General was undoubtedly an habitual visitor and an inti-

mate friend of the dowager's, but he was by no means the *ami de la maison* that her daughter-in-law was making him out to be.

"Well, if Letty's admirers think Sir Richard getting dangerous, they had better make running in earnest themselves."

"Exactly; that's just what I knew you'd say. My dear Jim, you can't think how happy you've made me! I felt sure you would agree with me as soon as you were told about the General's unscrupulous designs;" and Lady Hawksbury clasped her hands in what appeared to be a gush of enthusiasm.

This was her ladyship's great mistake in life. By nature a somewhat insincere, cold, unemotional woman, she had carefully cultivated an enthusiastic emotional manner. The result may be easily imagined. It was impossible to believe Lady Hawksbury ever to be in earnest; she was always over-acting. If she really was glad to see you, she strove to convey the idea that the sight

of you was the one thing that could bring her perfect happiness in this world, which utter exaggeration of course simply left the idea that her welcome was a mere sham. She was thoroughly and sincerely delighted to find her son, as she conceived, about to act as she would have him do in this matter, but she could not resist a burst of enthusiastic gush at the success of her scheme, calculated to impress a looker-on that she was only acting.

"I don't think, mother, you are quite justified in talking about 'the General's unscrupulous designs.' If you are right, and Sir Richard is doing his best to win Letty, I don't see why he shouldn't if he can. If she doesn't mind his age we needn't, and she has no manner of need to take him if she don't like."

"Good gracious, Jim, don't turn round in this ridiculous fashion!" exclaimed her ladyship. "You may make too certain, you know."

"What on earth do you mean?" cried the hussar, suddenly extricating himself from the depths of the chair in which he had been lounging.

"Did you not say just now that if Sir Richard was really coming forward, it would be advisable for Letty's admirers to do the like?"

"Of course I did, and I say so still. However much a man may think he has the best of a race of this sort, he can't complain of being beat if he lets the other fellow walk over."

"And yet that is what you are going to do apparently."

"I! Why, my dear mother, what have I to do with it?"

"Why," cried Lady Hawksbury, utterly oblivious for the moment of her subtle plan for accelerating her son's sluggish passion, "why, you can't expect to marry Letty Auriole if you don't ask her."

The hussar gave vent to a low whistle.

He saw it all now. My lady's schemes were often the subject of mirth to her children, she usually blurting out her deeply conceived designs pretty much after the manner she had just done. It was with a smile he answered:

"So you have been endeavouring to plant the thorns of jealousy in my breast, and thought to spur me to madness by telling me how well Sir Richard's attentions were received. What a crafty mother it is!"

"You know, Jim, it is for your own good."

"But I don't want to marry Letty."

"Not marry Letty! You must," exclaimed Lady Hawksbury, aghast.

"Excuse me, I really cannot see any must about it. I've never thought about marriage at all as yet, and am sure there's no necessity for giving it my serious attention at present."

"You will disappoint me and your father dreadfully, Jim, if you do not marry Letty Auriole."

"I know, my mother, that these are speculations women indulge in more often than men. Leave me alone for the present; I am in no hurry for a wife; but, mother, when the time does come, I must choose for myself. Good-bye."

Lady Hawksbury sat very disconsolate at the collapse of her scheme for some time after her son's departure. She solaced herself, however, with the reflection that she had done her duty; that she had found her son a bride, and if there was no bridal the fault rested not with her. Much comfort, too, did she derive from the reflection that some seven-and-twenty years ago the dowager had found Sir Randolph equally impracticable on the like occasion."

CHAPTER X.

CLARISSE'S MISGIVINGS.

As may be naturally supposed, Jim Hawksbury has made many a visit to the Fulham studio since the night the artist was stormbound in his chambers in Cleveland Row. There are two patent truths connected with these visits, which sometimes make even the reckless hussar ponder. In the first place, he can no longer shut his eyes to the fact that he is rapidly falling over head and ears in love with Clarisse Lydon. In the second place, he is painfully conscious that he is steadily losing a lot of money to her father at écarté. Nobody knows better than Jim what a man of the world would

pronounce upon his case. He himself would say the same of any one of his friends under similar circumstances, would give the same advice exactly that he feels convinced they would give him.

"Cut it at once, old fellow. Your artistic friend, depend upon it, is artistic in more ways than one. Jim, can't you see you have fallen into the hands of a regular leg, who, taking advantage of your being somewhat smitten with his daughter, is simply skinning you? Pull yourself together, reflect that Mr. Lydon is in all probability a professional gambler and his daughter a decoy duck."

Such, Jim Hawksbury knew, would be the verdict of any one of his acquaintances who should happen to discover all the circumstances of his intimacy with the Lydons. Yet Jim was prepared to stake his life on Clarisse's integrity. He swore her sweet face could never lie; if he was being plundered, it was without her knowledge or

connivance, he would pledge his existence. He recollected her astonishment when, the first time he appeared in Grove Terrace after that memorable dinner at The Vacuna, her father had suggested cards; how the servant had to be sent out to the stationer's to buy a couple of packs; and how Clarisse, looking on at their game with some curiosity, had told him she didn't know one card from another, and that she had never seen her father play before, was not aware indeed he could.

"Exceeding artfulness that, a little overdoing it, you know—girl her father's confederate, of course."

Yes, that would naturally be the judgment a man of the world must give in such case. When a young officer of dragoons picks up an elderly gentleman, of whom he knows nothing, with a pretty daughter, at a watering-place, fraternises with him, and the result of their intimacy is continuous écarté, and continuous loss to the dragoon; the

conclusion our worldly friend would come to must be obvious. And yet again Jim Hawksbury could by no means arrive at that conclusion.

He recalled to mind the singular change of purpose that had come across Lydon in Cleveland Row—the singular agitation which seemed to possess him before he determined to play, and the extraordinary absorption he had shown in the game after he had once commenced. He reflected that a similar mental struggle had seemed to preface Lydon's sending for the cards in Grove Terrace, and that he always played in the same wrapped manner that he had done upon that first occasion. Again, although Hawksbury now owed him a considerable sum, he seemed perfectly indifferent about payment. Was the manner this sum had mounted up characteristic of the card-sharper, or the reverse? Their stakes had gradually been raised higher and higher, at Lydon's suggestion, in order that Jim

should have a chance to retrieve his ill fortune; but though he had occasionally transient gleams of success, in the main the battle went steadily against him.

One incident in all this puzzled him much. Upon one occasion Lydon had said, somewhat wildly: "Hawksbury, I must stop this, these accursed cards are becoming my masters. I feel as if I was given over to them body and soul, as if they had possession of me in the way dram-drinking and opium-smoking enfold their victims."

Jim, courteously assenting, replied: "With all my heart. I'll just make up our account, and give you a cheque for it in a day or two."

Indeed, the young man was no gambler at heart, and sometimes thought all this écarté a bore, and a thing he would be very glad to have done with. I don't think at that time he had counted up very clearly what it was costing him, but he did think that to walk or talk with Clarisse Lydon would be

infinitely more charming on these sunny May afternoons, than this persistent card-playing with her father. Still he was conscious that there are times when a certain amount of draughts, cribbage, or their equivalent have to be got through with the parents of the beloved one. There is some servitude, even in these days, to be undergone before Rachel is committed to our keeping; but that it should take the form of écarté for high stakes, was, to say the least of it, singular and unprecedented.

But that resolution of Lydon's to wrench himself from the thrall of the demon of play was rendered nugatory by a peculiar but insurmountable objection which he saw to their desisting at this particular time. No money had passed between them; and now they come to make up the account, it became apparent that Jim was a heavier loser than even he had imagined himself to be. As for Lydon, he professed great astonishment that his winnings could have

amounted to so high a figure. He declared, that though he had roughly noted down the results of each encounter, he had never been at the pains to add them up.

"My dear Hawksbury," he said, "I cannot take this sum from you; it is impossible for us to stop just now; we must go on till the balance between us is trivial, either on one side or the other, then we will make an end of it at once, and put the accursed cards away forever."

He spoke passionately, and Jim fancied he could see him shiver slightly, as men do at times on recalling some ugly memory of the past. "What interpretation," thought Hawksbury, as he walked back from Fulham on that occasion, "is one to place upon this? Most men, I presume, would say I am in the hands of an experienced gambler, who is intent upon plucking me to the last feather; and, upon my life, I couldn't blame them for thinking that it is so. The only thing is. that I don't agree with them."

The glamour of love closes our eyes to a multitude of things. It glosses over and refines objectionable relations; it maketh a bare sufficiency to assume the aspect of a comfortable independence; it tinges our hopes with rose-colour; it teaches us to look upon those roseate hopes as already realised; it is wont to give us overweening confidence in our future—in short, it is wont for a time to deprive us of the clear use of our understanding. Jim Hawksbury is a shrewd man of the world, and if it had not been for the attraction of Clarisse Lydon's bright eyes, he had never been drawn into the écarté business. Now, he cannot think ill of Clarisse's father; he will not suspect that there can be more than ill-fortune connected with the reverses he so consistently sustains. Then, again, he argues this: four hundred and eighty-seven pounds—for his losses amount to that, in spite of the small stakes they commenced playing for—will involve an application to

Sir Randolph; that an application of that kind invariably involves a row, and, therefore, he may as well woo fortune a little longer, and endeavour to win back what he has lost. The interview with his father will be quite as unpleasant, whether the sum he wants be a little more or a little less.

"And you will be glad to get back to your own country again, no doubt," responded Jim, as he sat toying with a paper-knife in Clarisse Lydon's drawing-room one afternoon towards the end of May.

"Yes, though I confess to having had a pleasant time in England, too; but I look forward to seeing the old friends we left behind us once more."

"And when shall we see you again on this side?"

"I don't know. We must go home to arrange things a bit. But papa ought not to winter in Canada; we shall perhaps go south as soon as the cold sets in."

"I shall miss you terribly; it's sad work

always saying good-bye to friends, about whom you can make no definite conjecture as to when you may see them again."

"Yes," replied Clarisse, "but, thank Heaven, we always do hope to see them again; good-bye would be too painful to bear if it were not for that. We shall very likely come to England again; if not, well, we must hope that duty or curiosity may call you to my country."

"I'm afraid there's no chance of the first; they never send horse-soldiers to Canada. I wonder why not, by-the-way; not a cavalry country, I suppose."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Miss Lydon, roguishly; "I don't see why you shouldn't skate, curl, valse, and drive, as well as the infantry officers. That making yourselves agreeable, and proficiency in ball-giving, are what we Canada girls look upon as the chief duties of the army."

"Well," laughed Jim, "I hope we should not be found wanting in any of these points;

the ladies of England, I think, cherish similar views concerning our utility."

The conversation here rather dropped between them. We exchange nothings without much effort, but when we contemplate speaking in earnest, we are wont to find speech less fluent and to hesitate more about opening our lips.

These young people had each of them something of grave import to say to the other, and were meditating how best that something was to be said. It was a harder problem to solve for the man than the woman, because Clarisse Lydon did know what she wished to ask, and Hawksbury was by no means so thoroughly definite with regard to his question. What Jim wished to know was, how far he had progressed in his fair companion's good graces. It was no light flirtation this, on his part. He felt thoroughly in earnest, but, nevertheless, he had by no manner of means made up his mind to put his fortune to the test this after-

noon. He would fain discover what chance there might be for him should he ask this girl to be his wife, and yet he had not thoroughly decided that he would do so, let things look propitious as they might.

I suppose we don't all sally forth with our minds definitely made up on these occasions, and that accident quite as often precipitates a man into matrimony as not.

Miss Lydon, on the other hand, had in the last few days awoke to the fact that Jim and her father were not playing cards for sugar-plums, and that knowledge had perturbed her greatly. She was very young, and she knew very little about card-playing; but few of us attain our seventeenth year without, either orally or by reading, knowing that gambling is pretty sure to be disastrous to some of those engaged in it. Clarisse saw nothing but harm, either to her father or to a man she at all events liked extremely; and yet, girl as she was, how was she to interfere? Indulgent as her father was

to her, still she did not quite like to speak to him on this point. Was it possible to speak to Mr. Hawksbury? She thought so. At the present moment she is pondering upon how to begin. It looked quite easy last night; now, here is the opportunity, and it somehow seems an extremely awkward subject to touch upon.

She continues to stitch steadily at her embroidery, while Jim as continuously twirls the paper-knife between his restless fingers. That they have been some minutes without speaking occurs to neither of them—they are each too absorbed in their own thoughts; as usual, it is the woman's mind asserts itself first.

"Mr. Hawksbury!" suddenly exclaimed Clarisse, "will you forgive me a somewhat rude question?"

"Certainly; of course you have a motive for it, which probably makes it no longer rude."

"Are you very fond—I mean," asked

Clarisse, with some little hesitation, "very much given to playing cards?"

"No! Why?"

"Because you play here continually," she answered quickly, while the colour in her cheeks deepened; "and from a chance word you dropped the other night, I fancy you and papa bet a good deal of money on the game. It rather worries me to think it should be so."

This was an awkward complication. Jim was silent. He could not deny the fact, and he did not quite know what to plead in extenuation.

"I will tell you why," continued Clarisse; "I know very little about cards, but everybody knows when they are played for money someone must lose. We are not rich and cannot afford to lose."

"I can assure you your father is none the worse for our battles," interposed Jim, quickly.

"That makes it no better," replied the

girl. "If he is not, then you must be, and I am no whit better satisfied with the result. I cannot conceive what made him propose such a thing. Until the other night I had no suspicion that you played for anything but trifling stakes. It annoys me very much to find that it is quite the reverse, more particularly as it was papa proposed this dreadful écarté."

"Miss Lydon, you may acquit your father altogether on that point," replied Jim, earnestly. "We commenced our écarté the night he dined with me, and cards were proposed then neither by him nor myself, but by another man who had dined with us."

"I am glad of that—very glad of that. I assure you, Mr. Hawksbury, till the other day, I never saw my father with a card in his hand. We never had such a thing in the house before that I can remember."

"You see," replied Jim, more intent upon soothing the girl's vexation than anything

else, "your father, it so happened, was very lucky upon that first occasion in my rooms, and when I came down to see him a day or two after, I daresay he thought he ought to give me a chance of winning back what I had lost to him. No very great sum, by-the-way."

"Oh yes, that must have been how it was," cried the girl, gleefully. "He could not want to win your money, you know."

Jim, as he looked into her bright, eager face, believed her implicitly, albeit he was conscious of a lurking conviction that it would have been difficult to induce the world generally to share in that belief; moreover, whatever Alfred Lydon might or might not wish on this question of winning, he had so far undoubtedly won.

"However, Miss Lydon," said Hawksbury, "you're giving us good advice, and I will take care to profit by it. Your father, as you say, does not want to win my money any more than I do to lose it. Naturally,"

he continued, laughing, "the simplest precaution to take against such misfortune is to stop our play. Don't you think that will be best?"

"I should imagine so," rejoined the girl, quickly, "but it would be presumptuous of me to give an opinion. It's what I should like though."

"What Miss Lydon likes is law, as she well knows," returned the hussar, in such quiet, earnest tones, as made the speech considerably more than the empty compliment it habitually is.

"Then Miss Lydon requests you to stop to dinner," replied the girl, blushing slightly.

"I cannot do that," he rejoined quietly. "Do you not see it would be difficult to refuse your father's écarté invitation afterwards. Wait till I have had a satisfactory explanation with him on that subject."

"And why not have that to-night?" inquired Clarisse.

"Because it is not possible."

She knit her brows, and thought for a little, and then said, stretching out her hand: "Good-bye. I am not sure, but I think I understand. Things will be all arranged when next you come. Don't let it be long first."

CHAPTER XI.

"CLARISSE EXPOSTULATES."

CLARISSE sat pondering for some minutes after Hawksbury had departed. She was very seriously disturbed at discovering that her suspicions about the card-playing were only too true. It did not seem to her to make much difference as to who was the loser, who the winner. To pay a large sum of money Clarisse knew would inconvenience her father considerably. She presumed it would be pretty much the same with Mr. Hawksbury. She could not quite analyse her feelings, but it was very repugnant to her to think that the one friend they had made in England should have such cause to

rue the day he had made their acquaintance. That it should have all happened, too, in their own house made it appear worse still in her eyes. She was very young and with slight knowledge of the world, but she felt intensely that this was an affair upon which people would indulge in bitter commentary should they know of it. True, they lived so completely by themselves that there was little likelihood of its being discussed, but the girl derived little comfort from that.

Honest and straightforward by nature, and with a dash of chivalry in her disposition, this spoiling of the guest beneath their roof-tree seemed more shameful to Clarisse the more she reflected on it. She held to the Arab tradition concerning the obligations of bread and salt, and lacked utterly the refined cynicism so much in vogue midst society at present. She felt she must speak to her father about this matter, and yet she relished the idea no more than she had that of interrogating Hawksbury

about it. True, he was usually a kind, indulgent father to her, but he could speak sharp and be very decided on occasion. She rose at length, and, though her heart beat somewhat quickly, took her way resolutely to the painting-room.

Her father looked up at her for a moment, and then quietly continued his employment. Clarisse fidgeted about the room for a little, then crossing softly to the side of the easel, said abruptly: "Papa, what made you commence card-playing with Mr. Hawksbury?"

He started very slightly at her question, looked keenly into her face for a second, and then muttered, more to himself than in answer to her: "Ah, what?"

"I never knew you do such a thing before," she continued. "We never had a pack of cards in the house at home, and I can't tell you how sorry I was the other night when I found out that you and Mr. Hawksbury were betting high upon your game."

"I don't know," he replied, "that you had much cause to fret yourself about it, *ma mignonne.*"

Clarisse was astonished how gently he answered her. She could not know that her remonstrance recalled to Alfred Lydon another fair face that had similarly, in bygone years, pleaded with him to forego the fascination of high play, nor what unutterable woe the deaf ear he had turned to her prayer had afterwards occasioned the pleader.

She hesitated a moment before she answered. She could not quite tell her father she did not think it right; so cast about for a more uncompromising term.

"I do not think it nice," she said at length, "to win a lot of money from a guest, papa."

"And pray how do you know I have?" he inquired curiously.

"Because I spoke to Mr. Hawksbury about it."

"And he told you so?"

"No, indeed, he did not. I told him I knew that you were playing high, and that I didn't like it. He seemed to think that I was afraid on your account, and hastened to assure me that you were not hurt by it. But, of course, that is equivalent to saying that he is the loser."

"It is true, I have won a good deal from him; and it's God's truth, Clarisse, I wish I had not."

"I know it, papa. I was sure of it. I told Mr. Hawksbury that I was sure you couldn't want to win his money."

"Sit down, child, and listen to me. More than twenty years ago, I wrecked my life at the card-table. I'm not going to—indeed, I could not bear to—tell you the story, but I woke one morning socially ruined. From that moment I vowed never to touch a card again, and till about six weeks ago I kept my word. Gambling to me is a passion so absorbing, that there is nothing for it but

total abstinence. Like the drunkard or the opium-eater, I have no rational limits when I once embark on my delirium. You've read, perchance, of men who, when they once broke from their resolve against ardent spirits, lost all control over themselves, and could not refrain till either necessity or ill-health compelled them. I am the same in card-playing. I would play as long as ever I could induce men to sit at the table. I would play for almost any stakes they chose to propose. Once I taste this madness I am no longer master of myself. I am usually a fortunate player. I am abstemious, play well, and am always absorbed in the game; my adversary never obtains a hand's-breadth over me through inattention or want of memory, and the majority of men who play at times commit these indiscretions; those who are neophytes continually do so."

"Papa," interrupted Clarisse, in a low voice, "what chance had Mr. Hawksbury with you, even on your showing?"

"None, I admit," replied the artist. "I had not only those advantages over him I have mentioned, but I am a much superior player to boot."

"Was it right, then, to play with him for high stakes in your own house? Surely you cannot think that. How it all began I know — he told me, most thoroughly exonerating you at the same time."

"Did he," replied Lydon, with a faint smile. "It shows him a loyal, true-hearted gentleman, at all events. In the madness that has possessed me of late I have thought of nothing but the fierce excitement of the actual game. I knew I was a winner, but hardly realised to what an extent till Hawksbury insisted on making up the account. Still there are men who, losing in this way to a man of whom they know nothing, would have had ugly thoughts concerning it."

He strolled across to the fireplace as

he spoke, and looked moodily into the empty grate.

A terrible idea flashed across Clarisse's mind, and the girl turned pale almost to her lips; but no, she would not conceive that it was possible anyone could imagine her father guilty of anything dishonourable; still, what else could he allude to? That dim conception she had had, that people might make bitter comment concerning this business, if it got abroad, began to take definite shape in her mind.

"You surely cannot mean, papa," she stammered at length, "that anyone could dare to impute dishonourable motives to you?"

"Quite likely," he answered dryly.

"Oh why—oh why did you ever begin?" she exclaimed vehemently, as the idea that Hawksbury might also be imbued with that suspicion presented itself to her.

"Ah!" he replied slowly, as if arguing more with himself than answering her:

"Why? Plausible motive to myself—I had won a little from him, and wished that he should win it back. Real reason—the spirit of play that had been fettered within me for over twenty years was once more unchained."

"Still, papa, what induced you to increase the stakes as you have done of late?"

"The mocking fiend of play within me. I wished Hawksbury to recover his losses. I swore that I would play badly, that I would display such carelessness and obtuseness that fortune must run in his favour. Absurd. I could no more resist doing my utmost to beat him when we faced each other at the card-table, than if I had been playing for my very existence. I am a gambler, Clarisse, of the highest class; one who plays to win, not for the actual stake, but because to beat his opponent is a necessity to him. My nerve is as good playing for hundreds as

for halfpence; the fierce thirst to win about the same in either case. I am a phenomenon in this respect. I have seen few like me; never anyone who resembled me altogether. Those whom I have encountered, that come nearest to me, they who reckoned the victory of more account than the spoils, never possessed my faculty of absorption when the stakes were trifling. It seemed that the battle must be waged on a certain scale to interest them thoroughly. With me it is not so; once place cards in my hands and I must win, if it is possible for me to compass it. I cannot bear defeat, let the prize be only a sugar-plum. It is not so in other things," he continued in melancholy tones. "I would it were, and I might have shown more earnestness in life; but play, Clarisse, is my master, and I have never been able to strive so thoroughly in any other pursuit. It's an infatuation, monomania, what you will; my curse, and I cannot help it."

As he finished, he turned, and resting his elbow upon the mantelpiece, looked steadfastly at his daughter.

She bent her head to avoid his gaze, toying nervously with some work that she had in her hand.

"You love this man," he exclaimed sharply.

"You have no right to say that of me," she replied quickly, as she threw her head proudly up, though her cheeks flushed somewhat at the abrupt accusation. "I am not likely to bestow what has not been sought, and Mr. Hawksbury has never spoken to me in that wise. He is the one friend we have made in England, and I am loath to think that he should ever have cause, perhaps bitter cause—you know best, papa—to remember that he had made our acquaintance."

"What would you have me do?" he inquired curiously.

"Give up playing with him."

"You little fool, how can I? I, who am at present a considerable winner, refuse to continue! Impossible. I must play on as long as he likes. That he will ever recover his losses is, as I told you, hopeless. Despite every resolution I could make, I cannot help playing to win. I am too good for him in every point, and can no more resist putting forth all my strength when it comes to the test than I can help breathing. I must win."

Clarisse dropped her head upon her hands. Even she saw no solution of this difficulty. Clearly her father, as a winner, could not decline to continue the fray should the loser desire it; and yet, as he himself told her, the longer the struggle should last the worse it would be for Jim.

"My mind is made up," said her father, after a pause of some minutes. "I am as anxious there should be an end of this business as yourself. We must leave England at once; it is but anticipating

our departure by three weeks. All that is very simple. You have only to bear in mind that Hawksbury must have no inkling of our change of plans."

"Do you mean that we are not to say good-bye to him?" exclaimed Clarisse, with symptoms of dismay visible in her countenance.

"Precisely. That is a very essential part of my plan."

"But what will he think of us? It is so uncourteous, so unkind not to wish him farewell."

"It is impossible. Can you not see that if he says good-bye to me he will have to pay what he owes me?"

"But you wouldn't take the money," said the girl, anxiously.

"You don't understand these things. I should have no alternative; it would be impossible for me to refuse. Men when they gamble do so in earnest, and I cannot treat Hawksbury as if he were a child. It

would be an impertinence that he would be quite justified in resenting. No; he will feel himself bound in honour to settle with me before I leave, and I cannot decline to receive his money; but if I leave at once, unexpectedly, without his knowledge, I prevent there being a settlement between us. It is the only manner in which I can prevent his suffering a somewhat heavy loss at my hands, and to some extent redeem my broken vow."

"I understand," replied the girl. "It is better far that he should think us rude than that you should take this money. Still, I own that I am sorry that he should even be left to imagine that of us."

"You seem strangely anxious about Mr. Hawksbury's good opinion," said Lydon, quietly.

"Not more than we have good cause for. He is the one friend, remember, that we have made since we set foot in this country," retorted Clarisse, throwing back

her head defiantly. "Since he has been at Aldershot, and we have seen much of him, he has been kindness itself in so many little ways—about books, music, lots of things. I shall miss him immensely, and own honestly it is a trouble to me to know that I cannot wish him good-bye."

Lydon made no answer, but, crossing over to his easel, proceeded to cleanse and lay aside his brushes. That done, he turned and said: "I shall take berths in the next steamer, if possible. You can get ready."

"Of course," replied the girl.

Her father left the room without further remark, and Clarisse was left to picture to herself what Jim Hawksbury would think of their stealthy and silent departure when he should come to know of it.

What he actually did think she was not destined to know till many months afterwards.

CHAPTER XII.

"A FEW WORDS WITH SIR RANDOLPH."

As Jim Hawksbury walked back from Grove Terrace after his talk with Clarisse Lydon, he began to think somehow seriously over the situation. Yes, he no longer attempted to deny to himself that his feeling for the girl was considerably more than it is good to hold in the game of ephemeral flirtation; even that had never been very much in Jim's way, and so far he had been strangely careless to female fascination. It was not that he hadn't been kindly regarded by those on "promotion," or at all events by their mothers and chaperons, for a good-looking young fellow, who is heir to a

baronetcy and some eight or ten thousand a year, is worth spinning for, save by those who do their angling in very highly preserved waters. But Jim's enthusiastic sporting propensities keep him rather aloof from the drawing-room as a rule; it was not that he felt at all ill at ease in woman's society, simply that he did not run after it. He was popular with the sex enough, and by no means deficient in small talk when he met them at the dinner-table, could do his duty manfully at a country ball when he could be got there; but it must be owned when staying in a country house he was one of those men you saw little of in the daytime.

Jim Hawksbury is very fairly sensible for twenty-five, and proceeds, as he walks leisurely through the Park, to argue this affair out with himself. Quite clear, he admits in the first place, that he has arrived at caring about Clarisse very much more than is prudent, and what conclusion is he

to come to on this point—what is to be the end of it? It is difficult to decide this, because he has not at all made up his own mind on the subject. Does he thoroughly believe in the honesty and honour of this man, whose luck at cards is so unvarying? He thinks so, but is conscious of dim misgivings in the background; above all, that to no one else conversant with the story will any such credulity be vouchsafed. That Clarisse is thoroughly innocent of any complicity to plunder him, if such scheme after all there be, he is prepared to swear; after to-day's conversation who could doubt her? Still, does he love this girl, of whose antecedents he knows nothing, well enough to marry her in the face of the world and his relations? He cannot say. He is quite aware of what the verdict would be on such a match. Keep the story quiet as he likes, he must go to his father for this money, and Sir Randolph will draw his own deductions only too quickly of the why it was wanted,

quite certain that cards were at the bottom of it; it will leak out. Verdict of society—that he fell a victim to a practised gambler, who stripped him to begin with, and then married him to his daughter. Poor Jim Hawksbury!

After a time he dismisses this problem from his mind. Quite clear about his love for Clarisse, but still painfully uncertain how far it is reciprocated, and he feels, till he has arrived at a clear understanding on this point, it is not necessary to come to a determination. The next thing he has to consider is simple—his mind pretty well made up about this, as soon as Clarisse told him how this card-playing for high stakes worried her. He would stop at once. It was scarce likely, he felt, that he should turn the tables on Lydon; he was convinced that the artist was a better player than himself; but Jim had seen fortune stand so much to a man, moderately capable of taking advantage of her smiles at écarté, that he had

rather trusted to his usually good luck to pull him through. Lydon, unfortunately, proved the better card-holder of the twain.

"Only one line to take," thought Jim, "make up our account, get the money from the governor—that involves a row, of course, but one's had 'em before—and then settle with Lydon, and tell him I'll have no more of it. If he's a leg he may try to dissuade me, and look dissatisfied. If he is not, he will acquiesce readily, and express some civil regrets at my ill luck: regrets," muttered Jim, with a rueful smile, "in which I shall heartily concur."

Two mornings after he had come to this resolution, Jim created some astonishment at Rutland Gate by presenting himself there in the morning, and requesting to see Sir Randolph. A little thrill of curiosity diffused itself throughout the house at this intelligence.

"What brings Mr. Hawksbury here before lunch?" asked the butler of his

compatriots below stairs, "which it's never his habit to come here before; and as for wanting to see Sir Randolph, it is what his family is not given to at this time of day, and I say emphatically with reason. Personally, I prefer to see as little as possible of him in the morning, disliking all unpleasantness which jars upon the nerves."

My lady rapidly arrived at the conclusion that her arguments had proved irresistible, and that Jim had come to explain his intentions regarding Letty Auriole to his father; while Sara Hawksbury, when her mother informed her of the fact, murmured to herself: "Jim's got into a scrape of some sort. I wonder what it is—only money, I trust." But on one point the household were in accord, although unknowingly, and were stricken with an insatiable desire to see Jim whenever he should emerge from Sir Randolph's sanctum. My lady and Sara, the butler and lady's maid, all smitten with this laudable spirit of inquiring into things

not concerning them. We may not be aware of it, but any departure from the ordinary routine of our lives places us at once under the strictest surveillance of our domestics, who think it incumbent upon them, not in our interests, but their own, to be as well informed about our thoughts, words, actions, and correspondence, as may be possible of attainment.

Sir Randolph always retired with his letters and the paper to his own room after breakfast, and it was perfectly understood that he was by no means heavenly of temper if disturbed, even when there was important reason for doing so, therefore the house had cause to imagine the interview between father and son about something of importance. Sir Randolph was not a man who had ever shown much affection for his children, and those who disliked his cold, indolent manner would have added, nor for anyone else; he was not a man of warm sympathies and quick feelings, nor given to

the forming of strong friendships. He had gone through life making many acquaintances, but very few intimates; he was indulgent to his family as long as they did not run counter to his wishes, and as those, thanks to his natural indolence, were but sparsely formulated, there was no very great scope for discovering his wife or children acting in opposition to them; when such had been the case, he had been invariably both obstinate and autocratic.

He looked up from his paper as his son entered, nodded carelessly to him, and said:

"You have something to say, of course, or you would'nt be here; you know I hate being bothered immediately after breakfast: won't it keep?"

One of Sir Randolph's hallucinations was that these were his business hours, though reading the paper, and occasionally answering a business letter, constituted the whole work done during this retirement; but there are divers elderly gentlemen who are wont

to retire to their studies under similar delusion.

"No; I am in a scrape, rather," replied Jim; "I got entangled in play before I knew quite what I was about, and I've lost a good lot of money."

"Excuse me," replied the Baronet; "but you're out of your teens: at your age men don't get entangled in play."

"Well, they ought not," replied Jim, as he quietly took a chair; "and it's been deuced stupid of me to do so; however, it's done, and there's nothing for it but to pay. I have stopped, and you need be in no fear of my taking to it again."

"I always considered, when I settled your present allowance, that it was to be sufficient. Remember, it was increased two years ago on an occasion of this kind, but now you have discovered that gambling is one of the essentials of a young man's life, it will be difficult to say what income you may require."

"It is no use talking in this way, father; I have knocked about the London world quite long enough to know that you played, in your youth, very much higher than I have done."

"Because I was a fool once, sir, it doesn't follow I am going to abet you in becoming one," retorted the Baronet sharply.

"As I told you before, I have quite finished with it. I have gone no tremendous smash. I'm not asking you to find a very big sum. Five hundred will see me all clear."

"And suppose I decline to let you have it?" said Sir Randolph, considerably relieved to find that it was no worse.

"You will compel me to raise it," retorted Jim coolly. "Of course I can in more ways than one, though it would probably entail going to the tribes for it. Judging by those that are left to us, it's an infinite mercy that five-sixths of the dozen were lost."

The jest rather tickled Sir Randolph, and he replied with quite a gracious grin: "Wrong again, Jim; competition always knocks down prices, and if we had not lost the confounded ten tribes we should have paid fifteen per cent. instead of fifty. Yes, they were a loss, a great loss to mankind; play and plunging will run high if ever they're found again. But I think you needn't trouble the children of Israel this time. You shall have the money, if you will only fall into my wishes about another little matter."

"What is it?" asked Jim, with some curiosity.

"Bah, a mere nothing; a thing that I know you have had in contemplation for years past. We have all known it, and wished it; Uncle Robert and all of us. It's getting time you settled down, Jim. I should like to have a glimpse of the boy who's to follow you, before you reign at Ringstone in my stead. Only tell me that

all is settled between you and Letty, and you shall have four times five hundred if you want it."

"I suppose it's my mother has been putting this into your head," returned Jim dryly.

"Your mother never put much into anyone's head," sneered the Baronet, "especially mine. I presume, however, she has been urging this upon your consideration, and for once in a way I'll admit she's been scheming to some purpose. What do you say?"

"I?" said Jim, as he threw himself back in his chair. "Why, of course, I'll have nothing to say on the subject. Letty and I have never thought about each other in that way, and it would bother us both dreadfully to begin now. It's no use castle-building, father; that's a match will never come off. To return to the subject of the five hundred."

"Do you mean to say that you refuse to ask Letty Auriole to marry you, when I tell

you it is my wish that you should do so," exclaimed Sir Randolph, with flushed cheeks and studied tones.

"Just so," replied Jim, curtly.

"Then find your five hundred as you best may," retorted his father, with eyes flaming with passion. It was the first time that anyone of his family had fairly revolted and defied his autocratic decrees. No wonder that Sir Randolph's wrath was stirred. Jim, and Sara also, had shown themselves contumacious before on occasion, but this was the first clear case of open mutiny.

Jim rose very deliberately. "Of course," he said, "if that is your final decision there's no more to be said. I must either pledge the commission or raise money on what is coming to me. It's a small affair, and not very difficult to manage."

"And has it occurred to you that I shall probably suspend your allowance?" interrupted Sir Randolph sharply.

"No; I don't well see how you could, without having the verdict of society against you, if not that of the law courts. You might curtail it, but you cannot leave your only son and heir without decent provision. Besides, my dear father, I have more confidence in your sense of justice. This five hundred you have every right to refuse me, but to cut off my allowance because I have got a little into difficulties is surely scarce fair. I am sorry we can't agree about things, but as it is so, I can only apologise for troubling you, and say good-bye."

Sir Randolph vouchsafing no reply, Jim left the room, with the intention of also leaving the house, but the butler, who was lying in wait in the hall, pounced upon him, and said that Lady Hawksbury wished to see him before he went. "Surely my mother can't want to talk this all over again," mused Jim, as he ascended the stairs. "By the Lord, if there is one thing more annoying than another, it's one's re-

lations taking into their heads the arrangement of one's marriage; as if anything but biliousness and ill-feeling could come of such unwarrantable interference in a man's affairs."

"Good morning, mother," said Jim, as he entered my lady's boudoir. "Pray excuse my asking what is it, without preamble, as I am grievously pressed for time. I beg pardon, Sara, I didn't see you at first," and crossing the room he shook hands with his sister, who was coiled up on an ottoman in the window.

"I don't wish to keep you, Jim," returned Lady Hawksbury, "but you have had a long and confidential interview with Sir Randolph this morning. May I ask what about? A mother's anxiety about her boy may well excuse the question."

It was palpable as she spoke, that she cared nothing concerning the conference of her husband and son, unless it had touched upon the present great scheme of her heart.

"We talked upon a very old theme," returned Jim, shortly, "and one upon which fathers and sons have been wont to differ from time immemorial—money matters."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Lady Hawksbury, at once utterly ignoring Jim's reply, "that Sir Randolph said nothing to you about what I urged the other day?"

"Oh yes," replied Jim, with a shrug of his shoulders, "of course we came to that. I don't suppose I shall be able to converse with any of my family without that cropping up for the next three months;" and here the hussar favoured Sara with a defiant glance, so thoroughly comprehended by the recipient, that she said quietly:

"I have no idea of what you are talking."

"Of the matrimonial arrangements you have been kind enough to map out for me amongst you," returned her brother.

"My dear Jim," observed Lady Hawksbury, "I am so glad to find that Sir

Randolph agrees with me on this point; really the sooner you settle things with Letty the better."

"I knew nothing of this," interposed Sara, quickly and earnestly, seeing at once that her parents had shattered her own pet dream by indiscreet interference.

"I told you the other day, mother," said Jim, "that you were altogether mistaken in this matter. Letty and I are excellent friends, with no wish to be anything more to each other. If you want nothing more with me excuse my saying good-bye; I am rather hurried."

"You are mad—ungrateful, to thwart the wishes of your parents," exclaimed Lady Hawksbury, applying her handkerchief to her eyes with much theatrical emotion.

Muttering something to the effect that parents who formed unreasonable wishes had no right to complain of their non-fulfilment, Jim, with a nod to his sister, left the room.

"To think that he should be so obstinate, so blind to his own interests!" said her ladyship, plaintively, and no more able to resist the temptation of posing before her daughter than if the audience had been larger.

"Ah, it has been a sad mistake, meddling between those two, mamma. I don't know what chance there was before, but I'm afraid now that wedding will never be," replied Sara.

She knew, none better, that there was a strong vein of what our friends call resolution, and our detractors obstinacy, underlying her brother's character—that especially was he not to be coerced or bullied into other people's opinions. Jim said quite truly that he had never dreamed of falling in love with Letty Auriole, and to achieve that blissful state at command of the authorities has been proved an impossibility from time out of mind. Whatever the future might have brought forth, Sara felt assured no warmer affection than

friendship would ever be born between those two now. Even if her brother would lend himself to such a scheme, Letty was far too quick-witted a girl not to see through the hollowness of a simulated passion, nor did Sara indeed desire that they should make a marriage *de convenance.* No; if no real love could ever spring up between the two, then she was content that her dream should never be realised; that it never would be now, Sara Hawksbury felt assured.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SETTLEMENT."

LEAVING Rutland Gate, Jim turns moodily up the Park, and commences to think it all out. What on earth could have suddenly put it into the heads of the family that he must wed Letty Auriole? What earthly business had parents in these nineteenth-century days to arrange marriages for their children in that arbitrary fashion? The governor, too, hinting at carrying on like a stock-comedy uncle! "Ridiculous! I shall marry whom I please," and as Jim came to that conclusion a fair face rose before him, which was not that of the heiress assuredly. The more he reflects on the morning's pro-

ceedings the more wrathful he becomes. He mutters disparaging comment of Sir Randolph to himself, such as sons will use at times when their progenitors decline to provide decently for their necessities. "It was no great sum for him to find," he argued; "and I've never gone a real cracker, as some fellows do. He's never been called upon to provide for more than a slight miscalculation of revenue. I don't want to go in for post-obits, bills, and all the regular routine, and I don't think, after what I said, he's likely to interfere with the allowance; but marry as I choose, I will, by G—d! and at no man's bidding." Very clear upon this latter point, Jim most especially decided that his wife shall be of his own selection, and advice or recommendation of relatives bear in no wise upon that question.

Still, the question more immediately in hand is the procuring of this five hundred pounds. It is not, as Jim truly said, one of any very great difficulty. There were

hundreds in Babylon who would be only too pleased to supply the heir of Ringstone Abbey with considerably more than that sum upon some formal signing of stamped papers. But if Jim had as yet been without dealings with the money-lenders, he was no neophyte about stepping within the toils, and was simply running over in his mind who of his friends might be best fitted to advise him in such emergency.

Still cogitating upon this subject, he walked up the north side of the Row, so as to avoid the throng that constitute, in society's slang, "a park," when he was suddenly arrested by a heavy hand on his shoulder, and the exclamation :

"Jim, my boy, you look as if you had a book that wouldn't bear thinking over."

"Uncle Robert!" he ejaculated, turning round on the aggressor, "why, what brings you to town?"

"Well, that's satisfactory," responded the Rector, with a jolly laugh. "It can't be

the book anyhow. What brings me to town? Why, what has brought me to town for the last five-and-twenty years—the Isthmian games, lad. I'm up to see the Derby."

"Of course. What a fool I am! Excuse me, I was rather in the clouds just now. Where are you going?"

"To lunch at the mother's. You'd better come too, Jim. The old lady's real fond of you, and, mind, she's one in ten thousand. Your grandmother is worth about a score of women of these times. Pooh, you needn't think of your sweetheart, whoever she be. For fun, for pluck, for brains, I never saw her equal. I can recollect when she used to dance, and lighter foot than hers there wasn't in all Broadshire."

The Rector was always enthusiastic about his mother; if he was her favourite son he well repaid her affection. From his boyish days to the present time, Uncle Robert would have been always ready to slave night and day at her behest. He said no more than

was part of his creed in life when he described his mother as a woman in ten thousand; indeed, less, for in his heart he believed there was no such other in existence.

"I shall be only too glad," returned the young man. "Whatever I may be of hers, I know grandmamma is an immense favourite of mine, though she does chaff me wickedly at times."

"Come along," said the Rector, as he linked his arm in his nephew's. "But what makes you look so particularly down in your luck the Monday before the Derby?"

Now, Uncle Robert had been the confidant of Jim's scrapes from early boyhood; from detection in premature smoking, or unwarranted looting of the orchard-house, to college bills, or subsequent "miscalculations of the revenue," Jim had never hid any secrets of this nature from the Rector. Uncle Robert never scolded, never stormed; to call his nephew an unmitigated young idiot was harsh language indeed from his lips,

and only to be evoked by extreme recklessness of conduct on Jim's part. He had stood, in times past, more than once, between Sir Randolph and his son, taking upon himself to break the lad's delinquencies to his brother, and fend off that first rush of wrath which is the natural outburst of an indolent disposition, when its serenity is abruptly disturbed.

It had always seemed a matter of course to have a talk with Uncle Robert over any worries or perplexities, both to Jim and Sara, even when they arrived at an age to treat direct with the reigning powers. It was, therefore, the most natural thing in the world that Jim should relate the story of his unsuccessful application to his father for the five hundred to the Rector. Of the condition Sir Randolph had attached to his complying with the demand, Jim said nothing—he simply chronicled his refusal; neither was he more communicative when Uncle Robert put some rather probing questions concerning how this money was

lost. That it was lost in play he made no disguise, but that he intended to say no more he made very evident. The Rector was far too high-minded a man to attempt to force a confidence; indeed, his great influence with his nephew and niece had been greatly acquired by their complete reliance that it was never necessary to tell more of the story than they chose to Uncle Robert.

"I don't think Randolph behaved well to you, I admit," said the Rev. Robert, at the end of his nephew's story; "of course, if you mean gambling it wouldn't be much good coming to your help, but I don't think you do. You evidently don't intend to tell me all about this business, and I wish to know no more than you choose I should. I thoroughly believe you want simply to pay up your losses, and have done with it as you say. I'd give you the money in a minute if I had it, but country parsons don't have such balances at their bankers' as a rule."

"My dear uncle, you couldn't think I meant that," interrupted Jim. "I always bring my scrapes to you, but I don't want anything more than to unburthen my mind. I daresay I shall raise what I require without paying unreasonably for it."

"No doubt; in the meanwhile, lunch is the thing we stand at present most in need of. I've a Broadshire appetite, man, and unless sport denies me opportunity, can always ply knife and fork with a vengeance at this time. Sport or food when the clock chimes two, that's my maxim."

"How are you, Robert?" exclaimed the Dowager, as she rose to receive her burly son's kiss. "I was expecting you, and thought I might reckon on your fondness for the flesh-pots. Where did you find Jim? Anyhow, I'm very pleased you did find him," she continued, as she greeted her grandson; "and now, come along, luncheon I know is ready. Letty has gone to have hers with the Desboroughs;

they are great friends of hers, as you may have heard."

"You look well, mother," said the Rector, as he helped himself to some cutlets. "You seem determined as ever to bid defiance to time. Upon my word, Jim, my mother looks younger than yours; now does she not?"

"There is a pretty compliment for a countryman," laughed the Dowager. "No wonder young ladies are fascinated by the cloth, when even bluff country clergymen like Robert are so silken-tongued. How does the parish go on? Which are the most aggravating just now, the poachers spiritual or the poachers material?"

"How dare you make jest of my parochial troubles? However, the Spurgeonites make but little way with us. We are orthodox to the backbone, as a rule, in Ringstone; believing much in short sermons, Christmas waits, and substantial help from both Abbey and Rectory in time of trouble.

A somewhat material belief, my mother, but very antithetical to spiritual conversion."

"And the fleshly poacher, the carnal man of snares and night practices?" inquired the old lady, her eyes twinkling with fun.

"I regret to admit that I happened to encounter two of those malignants but a week since, egging, and the result has been that two of the most incarnate poachers in the parish are likely to be in most excellent condition for harvesting, having withdrawn into temporary retirement on a strict and regular diet."

"What is this I hear about your father, Jim? Letty tells me he is moping; giving up hunting, shooting, &c. I meant to have asked you before, but forgot it, and you don't come here so often as you ought, you know."

The hussar was conscious of shortcomings in that respect. He had called more than once, but he knew his grandmother, though

not unreasonable, did like attention from those she was fond of, and that he stood high in her good graces he was perfectly aware. It was with some slight hesitation that, ignoring the final attack, he replied that his father had not been well that winter, and was forced to take care of himself.

"I am sorry to hear it. I was in hopes it was only one of Randolph's whimsies. He has crotchets at times, and some years back took it in his head that his heart or his lungs were affected, I forget which; but I know it turned out to be only his energy. Who's he under?"

"Fergusson," replied Jim, curtly.

"And now," said the old lady sharply, "what's the matter with you? You look as if you'd got into a scrape of some kind. What mischief has he got into, Robert? Fallen in love with someone he ought not, or has he been completing that expensive bit of literary work, a Derby book? Is the cause of his woe feminine or equine—

woman with an adamant heart, or a horse with an indifferent leg?"

Jim sat speechless under his grandmother's badinage for a moment, and then replied: "Nothing much; I'm in a bit of a hole, but I shall scrape through without any great damage to myself."

The Dowager made no reply, but looked inquiringly at her son.

"No great harm done," replied the Rector. "Jim's had a row with his father about money matters. He's been hit a little at play."

"Hold hard, Uncle Robert! that'll do. I didn't come here to bother grandmamma with my difficulty."

"And I should like to know, after your own parents, to whom you would come?" interposed Lady Hawksbury, with a slight shrug of her shoulders and elevation of the eyebrows. "I don't approve of play, mind, because it so often means ruin, but I'm not scared at the idea of it either. It was the

fashion of my young days; all gentlemen played then."

"Well," exclaimed the Rector, "I don't think the fashion has altered very much; it's a pleasant little vice, that seems to run through all time and all countries. Jim has lost his money, wishes to pay up and stop. It's not a very big thing, but Randolph refuses to pay it for him. Of course he will have to borrow it somewhere."

"Of course he must. How much is it?" inquired the Dowager.

"Five hundred," replied the Rector.

"Very good, Jim; I shall find it for you—as a loan, mind. You go down and see my solicitors after luncheon. I will give you a note to them, and they will let you have the money to-morrow, I've no doubt."

"My dear grandmother," exclaimed Jim, "this is most kind of you, but I don't think I ought to take advantage of it."

"Fiddlesticks! Do as you're told, sir," returned the Dowager gaily. "You think

your grandmother an innocent. Wait till you see. You will have to pay interest, mind, and now I'll confess what an avaricious old woman I am." She paused for a moment, and, with a comical expression in her face, said: "I couldn't bear the idea of all that heavy interest going *out* of the family," and, throwing herself back into her chair, Lady Hawksbury indulged in a hearty peal of laughter at her own joke.

Her ladyship was as good as her word. No sooner had they regained the drawing-room than she sat down to her davenport and wrote a note. Handing this to Jim, she bade him be off to her man of business with it at once, saying: "You will catch them before closing if you take a cab. I know these things ought to be settled promptly. I won't say don't play again, but I would have you let high play alone for the future. Good-bye. No, never mind thanking me. You haven't time and I don't like it. I know very well you're what you call awfully

obliged, and I feel what you call awfully jolly. Now be off with you."

The Dowager had been in the London world from her girlhood, and had learned to view its follies and its vices with a lenient eye. Somewhat of a pagan in regard to the stricter moralities, perhaps, especially on the point of charity towards one's neighbour, when that neighbour was eminently distasteful to her. She held the code of honour of society in respect to gambling, and saw no great harm in it as long as a man paid when he lost—a point by no means deemed imperative by the great gamblers east of Temple Bar.

Jim's interview with Lady Hawksbury's solicitors was perfectly satisfactory. He was told that the money should be at his disposal next day, and departed by the evening train for Aldershot in a tranquil frame of mind, and with the determination to wind up matters with Lydon on the morrow. That he had come to this resolve

through Clarisse's influence principally he made no disguise himself. He would have done it a little later, indeed must have done it a little later, as he knew full well, since Lydon's departure would have made it imperative; but it pleased him to think that he should do it at her bidding. He pictured to himself a sweet smile of approval when he told her that the écarté was all ended, and of late Jim had grown strangely solicitous about Miss Lydon's opinion. Courteous to women he invariably was, but he had troubled himself very little as to how they regarded him so far, and yet, as I said before, it was not that he had encountered chilly reception at their hands. A good-looking young fellow, with Jim Hawksbury's breeding and prospects, was scarce likely to meet that.

He started next day for Grove Terrace, with a goodly roll of notes in his pocket. He had made up his mind that if Clarisse should be at home he would ask to speak

with her father in private; he had no wish that she should have any clearer idea than that which at present possessed her of how very expensive an acquaintance her father had proved to him. She had fathomed the fact that their play was high, and that he was the loser; but he judged rightly, she had no suspicion of to such an extent. It would seem, too, he knew, a far larger sum in her eyes than it did in his own. Judging by what he saw of the Lydon *ménage*, it would represent a year's income; and Jim, though dimly, comprehended that to be that amount behind the world is source of exquisite misery, discomfort, and struggling, to those to whom it may occur. Clarisse would understand that more readily than the ease with which he had procured it; moreover, no power can diminish the importance of such a sum as five hundred pounds to people who are wont to live for a twelvemonth upon it.

However, he was spared all diplomacy on

this point, for the maid-servant informed him that her mistress was out, but that he would find master in the painting-room, and thither Jim made his way.

"Ha, Hawksbury," exclaimed the artist. "Charmed to see you. I am only too glad to have an excuse to knock off work and subside into talk and tobacco. Sit down and have a cigar. Clarisse is out, but I daresay on her return she will be able to endorse my invitation, and promise you that there is dinner of some kind."

"You are very good, but I must get back to Aldershot to-night."

"My dear Hawksbury, excuse me. My time here grows short, and the sooner you exact your revenge at écarté the better. I should be very loath to stop as we are now, though I'll own honestly, I wish we had never commenced."

"That's just what it is," said Jim, slowly. "It would, perhaps, have been better, and I believe you when you say you are loath to

leave off as we stand just now, but my mind's made up. I'll play no more, and have come down on purpose to settle with you."

"Impossible! we cannot leave off so. I could not take what you owe me now, though I don't know exactly what it is," and here Lydon's usually somewhat sneering features were visibly agitated.

"I owe you four hundred and eighty-seven," replied Jim, curtly, as he drew a roll of notes from his pocket and proceeded leisurely to count out the sum.

"You cannot suppose I would take that amount from *you*," interposed the artist.

"Quite right," rejoined Jim, grimly, as he went on with his counting. "I certainly didn't suppose it. Hoped it would be the other way, you know."

"But I tell you, Mr. Hawksbury, I refuse —ay, positively refuse to receive that money," rejoined Lydon, springing to his feet.

"Now what is the use of talking non-

sense," said Jim coolly. "I'll give in you don't feel more cock-a-hoop about taking it than I do about paying it. But you are a man of the world. You know there is no condoning of these sorts of debts. It's no matter how it all came about. I've lost and *must* pay. You've won and *must* receive. You may give it to hospitals, or what you will, but you understand, there is one man in the world you can't bestow it on —myself."

"But stop. Try your luck once again," cried Lydon; "it must change."

"Not likely; I've come to the limit of my tether, and a man at the end of his rope is always done. Besides," said Jim, continuing the numbering of notes, "I've vowed to play no more."

The artist walked the room impatiently for a few minutes.

"Here you are," exclaimed Jim, "four eighty-five in notes, and two sovereigns, make us quits."

There was a prosaicness about the two sovereigns—there is in most ordinary transactions of life. It is that asking for change that is so apt to explode those wild imaginings of our brain.

"Confound your two sovereigns, and, by G—d, sir, if you don't put those notes back again into your pocket I'll pitch the lot into the fire," cried the artist, furiously.

Jim rose. "I should never have thought," he said, "that you would lose your temper over such a trifle, Mr. Lydon. When you tell me to take that money back you talk nonsense, and you know it. Of course you may pitch it into the fire if you like. I should only suggest, throwing it into hospitals might be more beneficial."

Although Clarisse Lydon, he was ready to acknowledge, was much to him, though for Clarisse's sake he would fain keep on the best of terms with her father, yet Jim Hawksbury was neither to be diverted from the winding up of that écarté business, nor

to be brought to the idea that it was possible to bring it to any other conclusion. Jim had plenty of clear common sense, and a very accurate perception of the right and wrong of his own world. He knew, of course, Lydon's proposition was an absurdity. A man who allows himself to be forgiven a play debt loses caste in the estimation of his compeers, ranking almost below the man who fails to pay.

"Good-bye!" exclaimed Jim, after a short pause, during which the artist continued to pace the room in an extremely excited manner. "I shall hope to see you on Friday, and shall perhaps petition for some dinner."

Lydon stopped short in his walk.

"Good-bye, good-bye!" he said.

"Friday!"

"Yes, of course; delighted to see you. Once more good-bye!" and he gripped Jim's hand with a fervour so unusual as to rather astonish the hussar.

" Yes, Clarisse will be sorry to have missed you. Good-bye!"

" What the devil's the matter with him?" mused Jim, as he walked leisurely westwards. " Brandy or opium couldn't have made a greater mess of him than those four hundred and eighty-seven pounds seem to have done. Receiving money never bothered me in that way."

Three days later, on the Friday afternoon, when Jim Hawksbury went down to Grove Terrace and inquired for Miss Lydon, the servant-girl made answer that " they were gone."

" Yes ; but not for good ? " said Jim, with an easy smile of interrogation.

" I think so, sir ; they left for Liverpool," replied the nymph of the bell-pull.

END OF VOL. I.

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